BREAKTHROUGH

The Story of Bob and Betty Ekvall

By
Robert D. Carlson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Introduction

Prologue

1. Beginnings
2. Thinking the Unthinkable
3. Midwinter Madness
4. Preparations
5. Across the Min Shan
6. Lhamo
7. Duggur Steps In
8. Ngawa at Last
9. Evacuation
10. Return to Kansu
11. Unrestrained Violence
12. Opportunities and Setbacks
13. Return to Ngawa
14. Betty's Death

Epilogue

Afterword

For Further Reading

Appendix

Glossary

Preface

The Kansu-Tibetan border, where this story is set, was my childhood home. My parents, Edwin and Carol Carlson, arrived in China shortly before Bob and Betty Ekvall and for many years were their closest western neighbors. "Closest" is, of course, a relative term. At times it meant as little as two days by horseback, at other times as much three or four days. I visited the Ekvalls, played in the river with their son David, and went along on the final trip to Ngawa. These are my childhood memories.

The basic material for this book comes from Bob's own writings. He was working on an account of his missionary career when he suffered a stroke which prevented him from carrying the account beyond the events of 1929. The remainder comes from other writings of his, short accounts by other missionaries, and my own memories. It is impossible to estimate how much material has been lost because of hasty departures from the field, bandit activity, and careless handling of what would today be recognized as valuable resources for the writing of such an account as this!

As you read this account, remember that Bob and Betty Ekvall were not the only ones to attempt to reach the Tibetans with the Gospel. Their stories also deserve an audience, for they too are stories of incredible courage, difficult journeys, privations, suffering, and death in obedience to Christ's command: "Go…"

Anyone writing about China and Tibet must face the problem of spelling. Since neither language in written with the English alphabet, there are various ways the represent the sounds. In reading narratives written by other missionaries, I found widely different English spellings for the same Tibetan or Chinese words. An additional problem is the Chinese tendency to change the names of places, often to match the current political climate. I have tried to use Ekvalls' spellings of Tibetan words and names, as well as the place names (and spellings) which were in use during his time on the field. But even here there are problems. For example, in some writings Ekvall spelled his Tibetan name Shes Rab Brdzon Grus, transcribing each Tibetan letter whether pronounced or not. In other writings he tried to represent the actual pronunciation by using Shes Rab Dzon Dri or Sherab Dzondri. Neither practice can satisfy everyone. Scholars want to know how the word is spelled in Tibetan, while the uninitiated want some idea of how to pronounce those unpronounceable strings of consonants. A glossary at

the end of the book gives the modern names for the important places mentioned in the story.

Introduction

"The beginnings of the Kansu-Tibetan Border Mission lie far back in Alliance history, even to a time before the Alliance had come into being." So wrote Robert Ekvall as he began the history (Gateway to Tibet) of the field where both he and his parents worked. The first two Christian and Missionary Alliance missionaries, William Christie and W. W. Simpson, arrived in Taochow Old City in 1895, soon to be joined by the brothers Martin and David Ekvall. As the title of his book indicates, the Chinese province of Kansu was regarded as the doorway to Tibet, one on the un-reached lands on the heart of A. B. Simpson, founder of the Alliance.

Tibet, isolated, mysterious, protected by mountains and deserts, was the goal for many missionaries. But government policies, no less than geography, made access difficult of impossible. Only from Chine, where the borders were ill-defined and government control weak, was access possible for bringers of the Gospel. Because of this, a number of mission boards established stations along those borders, seeking to probe into areas of Tibetan population.

The Kansu-Tibetan Border field was a complex mixture of Chinese, Tibetan, and Muslim peoples. All missionaries learned Chinese as a first indispensable step. Those appointed to Tibetan work then studied Tibetan, while Muslim workers tackled the dialects of those groups. Early attempts at reaching the Tibetans were repulsed, sometimes with considerable violence. Although the goal of reaching Tibet was never abandoned, the missionary force increasingly directed its attention to the Chinese areas, with the result that there was a strong Chinese church by the 1920's, when this story begins.

No church was ever established among the Muslim groups. In some areas there was active hostility against the missionaries, while in Taochow Old City the so-called "New Sect" showed an active friendliness towards them. This somewhat liberal group remained loyally Muslim, but read the Koran in a Chinese version, and tried to stay aloof from the rabid anti-Chinese intrigues of their more conservative brothers. The sect was organized as a large and prosperous trading company which almost monopolized some aspects of Tibetan trade. Their traders traveled far and

wide among the Tibetans and were always willing to share their hard-earned knowledge with the missionaries.

There was, of course, no such thing as telephone or radio communication in that remote part of China in those years, though most stations were near a post office. There was no public transportation; the most common means of travel was by horseback, particularly among the Tibetans. Inns could be found in Chinese and Muslim areas only.

Because of this, as well as the fact that Tibetans knew and cared nothing about passports and visas, it was essential to operate within the well-established system of host/sponsor and guest/client. Under this system, a mutual friend could introduce a stranger to someone in a particular village or tribe. This was not a casual event, but a deliberate recommendation of one friend to another. There was generally a formal presentation of gifts, and always an exchange of "scarves of blessing," which were usually draped over the gift. By this exchange the newcomer became a guest/client of his new host/sponsor. The host assumed a certain amount of responsibility for his guest, who was thereafter under his protection. If the host visited the guest, the roles were reversed. Consequently all mission stations in towns that Tibetans might visit had a good-sized guest room which was open to all Tibetan friends.

Travel among the Tibetans was always somewhat hazardous, since every Tibetan layman was a potential if not actual robber. After some harrowing experiences it became the custom for missionaries always to travel armed, just as all Tibetans were armed as they traveled. This was simple conformity with the customs of the land. Robbers, seeing that a group was armed and appeared unafraid, would generally leave them alone.

Dominating the religious scene were the monasteries (also called lama*series*) with their lamas and monks. Contrary to some popular thought, not all inmates of a monastery were lamas. A lama ("high one") was believed to be a reincarnation of the Buddhahood who returned to earth to help all living beings. A lama was a lama by birth, and nothing he did would change that fact. Some monasteries had no lama, while others had several. On the other hand, men did not become monks by birth. Most were given to the monastery by their parents while still quite young and thereafter took their vows. Others entered the monastery as grown men. A monk could break his vows and become a renegade, although he could still live

and dress in the red robes of a monk. All monks were addressed as *Aku* ("uncle") as a matter of courtesy.

The staple Tibetan food was *tsamba*. This was a flour made from roasted barley, and was eaten with butter and tea. The diner placed a generous slab of butter in a bowl of tea. He would then drink the tea by blowing aside the melted butter. After several bowls of tea, he would add *tsamba* and mix it with his fingers and hands until it had the consistency of modeling clay. Cheese was similar to cottage cheese, but sun-dried consistency of gravel. This could be softened in a person's tea and eaten with the *tsamba*. Meat was a regular part of the nomad's diet, as was *Zho*, or yogurt.

A constant pitfall for the outsider was the Tibetan custom of nicknames. Sometimes these were simply shortenings of a person's name, and were used in speaking to the person. Many of them, however, were pitiless descriptions-the sort which could start a fight. Among Ekvall's friends were the bearers of such appropriate names as Stretch Ears, Slab Face, Fence Teeth, and Squint Eye. These names were used by everyone in speaking *about* a person, but were never used in speaking to that person. He himself pretended to be ignorant of the name by which he was known to everyone else.

PROLOGUE

In helpless sympathy and un-admitted fears his colleagues urged him to wait until the year would end; the New Year bringing spring and the opening of ice-snow blocked tails. But he could not stay. He had to return to that place which should echo the sound of her footsteps and her voice. There were children and their mothers for whom she had signaled Christmas with gifts, singing, and the telling of the Story. He dare not fail to bring, from her to them, the tokens of that time of gifts and marvels.

Days later the trail, no longer under snow as at the high pass, faded into uncertainty as duck came on, then changed into blackness in which only the horses seemed to know the next step to the opening door of a friendly house.

In the fire glow of the hearth, Tibetan welcome changed, as was right in that time and place, into Tibetan condolence. Three generations- grandfather, son and grandson- spoke their special thoughts to fit a common theme of mourning and advice; "Ah pitiful, indeed pitiful, that Dorje Mtso the beautiful one is no more… always with you… even here when last you came… pouring your tea… talking to you with wisdom… riding with you… having food together… ah pitiful indeed that now you are alone… alone to drink bitter tea… no one to talk your own language… Dorje Mtso the beautiful one… and now she is gone… you must not think thoughts of sorrow too hard and long… ride to all your friends… son untamed, do not drink your tea alone… all your friends will help you live… ah Dorje Mtso the beautiful one."

As Tibetan condolence ebbed, the granddaughter still whimpering as she poured the tea, three friendly faces seemed to change, becoming three intense question marks about something that had to be known. Beyond the telling of the Jesus religion which they had heard before, there was now something new they had to know. The grandfather asked the question:

"In the faith you have, what does the Jesus religion say about Dorje Mtso? Where is she now?"

"With Jesus dwelling-safe."

"Truly?"

"Yes, truly."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. Really."

Out of a long silence, and partly to himself, the grandfather spoke again, in wonderment.

"Now I too have faith. The Jesus religion must be true."

His face turned toward son and grandson, as they too nodded and muttered their assent. He spoke again.

"Then what must be done now to become Jesus ones?"

The sudden unexpected breakthrough-three friends becoming three brothers, and their home a new refuge-brought a harsh and strangely bitter exultation, but little comfort, as he guided them along the Way. In the long night while waiting, so often, for day break, he swallowed sobs, choking on the words, "Lord, did it have to be this way?"

(Except from *Dark Campus*, an unpublished work

Robert Ekvall.)

Beginnings

Robert Brainerd Ekvall was born in Minchow in China's Kansu province on February 18, 1898, the first child of David and Helen Ekvall. The family had to leave China in 1900 because of the Boxer Rebellion, but returned two years later. Bob was educated in a home-designed program which included English, literature, Latin, and Swedish. His father, David Ekvall, had a good-sized library, and would regularly read to the family from works on history, mythology, and world literature. From his early years Bob was equally fluent in English and Chinese.

David Ekvall died from typhus in 1912, at which time Bob, his mother, and four-year-old sister returned to the United States, where they settled in Nyack, New York. Bob was out of step with his high-school

classmates, but fin in because of his athletic ability. A strong swimmer, Bob swam the two-mile-wide Tappan Zee below Nyack when he was sixteen. Unfortunately the feat was overshadowed by the outbreak of World War I, and never rated mention in the local paper.

Bob had always planned to return to China, and was urged to take a year in the Missionary Training Institute as preparation. Instead, he enrolled at Wheaton (Illinois) College, where he completed a four-year course in three, while taking part in football, track, basketball, intramural boxing and wrestling, glee club and literary societies. He majored in writing. One of his classmates in the class of 1920 was Betty Fischer, a quiet, brown-haired and brown-eyed member of a family prominent in Wheaton's history. Bob and Betty were married in 1921 and sailed for China late in 1922 after spending a year at the Missionary Training Institute.

The normal travel time across China in those years was approximately six weeks, and new missionaries always traveled with senior missionaries, since English simply was not spoken in the interior. But Bob needed no interpreter, so he and Betty traveled unescorted, arriving on the field in the spring of 1923.

In giving himself to God for His service, Bob had also brought with him the use of Chinese, his second mother tongue, as a gift for Him to use. Even after almost ten years in the States, it lay just below the surface, subject to recall as needed. On arrival in the port of Shanghai, Bob found himself giving directions about baggage to a dockside coolie. The following afternoon he gave his testimony, without the help of an interpreter, in a Chinese church. After crossing the breadth of China, Bob and Betty arrived to a special welcome from the Titao church, for Titao was the place of his childhood. He was Chinese, to serve the Lord in Chinese, linguistically free in the land of his birth.

When Bob and Betty arrived at Titao, the field headquarters, it was a foregone conclusion in the minds of everyone that they were to work in the Chinese sector of the field. There seemed to be no reason to question that conclusion. It had also been predetermined that responsibility for the entire school system of the mission was to be his as soon as two conditions were met: he had to learn to read more fluently, and he had to add academic vocabulary and phrasing to his childhood language. He was also to be the

principle of the Bible School which his father had founded two years before his death.

Study and work went on as scheduled. Study was a cram effort of long hours aimed at taking four language exams within two years. As to work, Bob soon began to preach, taking his turn in the Titao church, but more often visiting in small communities of Christians within a radius of twenty miles. After an early start and a fast horseback ride he could preach twice, share the noon meal, and still get back before the city gates closed at dusk. He also began to teach, improvising lectures on church history, and taking part in question-and-answer discussions of the meaning and implications of the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Bob's Chinese associates treated him with a very special empathy, for he was his father's son, continuing his father's work, in good Chinese style. Somehow he was one of them, one of their own. In that sense of oneness they could even graciously overlook such strange behavior as playing softball and enjoying hard riding.

On Bob's part, that subconscious identification affected his viewpoint when, as a member of the Field Executive Committee, he had a part in weighing proposals and requests from the leaders of the national church. These suggestions might at times seem strange or even slightly outrageous to his fellow-missionaries, but to Bob they would appear to be quite reasonable and to make good Chinese sense in a Chinese context. Increasingly his own situation seemed strange to him. There was more than a hint of absurdity in the statement that he was to "run the Bible School and supervise the work of the Vice-principal and staff." Paul Gou, the Vice-principal, was an outstanding teacher with energy, consecration, and self-sacrifice to match a truly great intellect. Furthermore, in problems of administration, his solutions were the natural Chinese ones. Pastor Gou sensed Bob's embarrassment, and did his courteous and friendly best to help him forget it. Yet Bob felt that the roles should have been reversed; he would delightedly have served as Pastor Gou's assistant.

Bob and Betty lived in homey comfort in a little house behind the Bible School compound. Their days were full of work and achievement. Betty soon began to match Bob in familiarity with the written language, and with gentle smile and low, level voice made her contact with the women of the church. Guests came to see "the new daughter-in-law in the family of

the elder Pastor Ekvall." This title gave her a standing quite out of the ordinary for a newcomer. There was no room for loneliness; fellow-missionaries and the mission headquarters made a supportive community and formed deep and enduring friendships. Being God's messenger to the Chinese was truly the best life there could be.

Yet…and but…

Thinking the Unthinkable

Even in their first year on the field, a greater, or at least different, challenge began to emerge. Bob came to think the unthinkable. Both came to think the unthinkable. And for Betty, that thinking was much more assertive and positive than the simple acceptance in which she had followed her husband to China and to his predetermined career. The premonition started later that summer when they traveled to Chone for the annual conference of missionaries. Betty's zest for riding made it possible to follow out-of-the-way trials rather than the main road through Minchow. So with their two horses, a mule, and its owner to handle the baggage, they set out on a shortcut which would take them though the mountains, a shortcut across a stretch of Tibetan country. The third day of the trip brought a zigzag trail up a steep forested slope, a fearsome swamp at the foot of a still-higher mountain, shallow side valleys where black tents nestled near the skyline, and finally red-and-white Charkhi monastery halfway up a hillside above the valley floor.

It was still early in the afternoon and they could have reached Chone before dark. But the mule, a helpless creature in swampland, was exhausted and needed rest and pasture. Fumblingly they began to set up an open-air camp, to the chattering of some boy monks. They sounded amused and scornful. Then a line of monks wound its way down the hillside, and the leader gravely spoke to Bob at length. But Bob understood not a single word! The sudden shock of non-comprehension struck him like a blow, shattering his assurance. Never before had he been reduced from fluent speech to sign language. Then a younger monk with halting but adequate Chinese took charge.

"You can't stay here… there may be thieves at night… you don't even have hobbles for your horses… you must stay in my cloister… come now and by my guests… I am your…" and here he fumbled for the word host and, not finding it, ended with "…master."

Almost instantly they found themselves in the monastery, where they were given quarters and lavish hospitality. They learned their first Tibetan phrase, three rolling syllables meaning "great thanks." Bob had learned something about gifts and their function in Tibetan culture, but he ha nothing prepared. He did not dare offer outright payment. But William Christie, the field chairmen, had given him some Tibetan tracts and a few of

the “scarves of blessing” which accompany every gift. As an addition to a tract and scarf, Bob wrapped a couple of silver dollars in its folds and was much relieved when it became evident that he had done the correct thing. Monastery activity went on its customary solemn rhythm. Nevertheless, relays of monks came and went to satisfy their curiosity. Villagers also came to stare; some were aloof, others friendly. Bob and Betty went to sleep to the sound of chanting in the nearby assembly hall, and were helped off to an early start the next morning.

At the crest of the pass where they would leave Tibetan country and return to Chinese villages, they could see the snow-crested rocky wall of the Min Shan range, fifty miles away and stretching across more than ninety degrees of the horizon. “No missionary has ever gone to the other side of those cliffs,” Bob commented, “and the land beyond, for hundreds of miles, is all Tibetan-villages encampments, and monasteries.”

Some days later Bob learned that he had been mistaken in that assumption. Earlier that summer five missionaries-Al Fesmire, Stan Harrison, Marion Griebenow, and Dick Koenigswald, together with George Bell from a small sister mission-had crossed the Min Shan. In a month-long journey, moving with haste and seldom resting for even a day, they had traced a great arc through unknown country. Their report named tribes, villages, encampments, and monasteries. They told of hostility as well as unexpected friendliness; of arrogance and suspicion on the part of chiefs and high lamas. Always there had been rumors of robbers. The weather had been pitiless, with drenching rain in the valleys, driving hail in the higher grasslands, and heat and thirst in one expanse of desert. There were hints, too, of belated awareness of lack of adequate transportation, camping gear, and travel know-how. During the last two or three days of the journey, the men often had to walk, leading their tottering animals. Their lean and footsore horses registered a silent protest against too-heavy loads, lack of food, and driving haste.

Bob listened with detached interest to the formal report and the more revealing informal discussions. Surely problems of Tibetan travel and work would never be his, would they? Certainly missionaries had crossed the snow-capped Min Shan to see what lay beyond. But did that really have anything to do with Bob and Betty’s future?

So they went back to the good life and to the absorbing and fruitful work they had in Titao. Still, questions about their future would occasionally creep into their happy talking.

At the time of the mid-winter break, early in 1924, they were asked to escort a new missionary couple to Labrang. There the newcomers would meet their first Tibetans and begin their language study. For Bob and Betty, gleefully in the saddle again, the trip promised to be a grand lark. If they didn't delay along the way, they would get to Labrang in time to see the great Tibetan New Year ritual, the "wishing prayer festival." Bob indeed had a special interest in Labrang, for it was in Labrang that his father and Mr. Christie had been attacked with stones by a Tibetan mob some thirty years earlier for trying to give out Tibetan tracts.

After six days of travel they rounded the last bend of the valley and saw the sturdy fort of the Muslim cavalry. Then came the hodge-podge squalor of the trading post. Finally, filling the valley, lay the magnificent spread of the monastery, white monks' quarters, great dark temples and chanting halls, and towers pointing skyward. The mission quarters, facing the marketplace, were cramped and drafty. But the welcome from Blanche and Marion Griebenow was warm with the fellowship of shared faith and commitment. After turning the new recruits over to their hosts, Betty and Bob were free for adventuring and savoring what Labrang had to offer at festival time.

The next morning Bob visited the commander of the Muslim garrison to report their arrival. In his office he was introduced to a twelve-year-old staff member whom everyone called "Little General." Bob had no premonition that in future scenes of violence and battle he would be most grateful for this casual meeting. Throughout the afternoon Bob and Betty together roamed the marketplace, soaking up local color and meeting everything from friendly laughter to black scowls. A scowl is especially black when the scowler has a hand on his sword, though the gesture was probably nothing more than horseplay.

On the day of the dance ritual, that ceremony claimed all attention. Until sundown the crowds watched the richly-garbed dancer impersonating gods and demons, moving to the rhythm set by trumpets, drums, and cymbals. The thousands of spectators, both laymen and monks, had an intensity of concentration which made them participants rather than mere

spectators in the conflict of evil and good, curse and blessing, disaster and well-being.

The trumpets continued to sound what seemed almost like defiance as Betty and Bob hurried through the crowd. Along the *gora* path that bordered the monastery, merit-seeking pilgrims were still turning the great prayer wheels, cylinders several feet in height packed with paper on which the mystical formula *Ohm Mani Padme Hum* had been printed as many times as possible. Ragged and dust-covered figures rose and fell like human inchworms as they prostrated their way around the monastery in their search for merit and peace. Betty and Bob had little to say to each other as they made their way back to the mission station. But Bob, probing into the future, had begun to wonder, "With all that intensity of longing and effort, what kind of Christians will Tibetans become?"

At the supper table there was awkward silence until the new recruits admitted that they had changed their minds about Tibetan work and wished to go back to Titao to start preparing for work among Chinese or Muslims. Bob assured them that they would be able to leave very soon. Then he went down to the stable to check on a saddle sore on one of the horses. Betty went along carrying a candle to light the darkness of the stable. The sore sport seemed much better. But there in the stable they faced each other with an almost simultaneous exclamation of the unthinkable: "If only we could have had a chance like theirs to make a choice!"

Midwinter Madness

Bob and Betty said nothing about their thoughts when they arrived in Titao, but at the Executive Committee meeting a few weeks later Bob let the cat out of the bag by requesting permission to bring a Tibetan monk to Titao to help with the Tibetan language. The committee was not happy. They argued that Bob had too much to do to permit any distractions; time taken for the study of Tibetan would interfere with work already in progress.

Bob's answer was that he had no intention of *studying*, but wanted to try and experiment in a new way learning a language which he had heard about. The best definition he could give way "from sound to meaning instead of from meaning to sound." All he wanted was a Tibetan who would talk about whatever was going on around them, and little by little Betty and he would get meaning out of the sounds they were hearing.

Somehow persuaded, the committee let them have their Tibetan. He had taught other missionaries, and was much surprised that Bob didn't bring out any books. He became really outraged when Bob showed no interest in learning the Tibetan alphabet, but wanted only to listen to him talk. In the long run, both Bob and Betty logged a surprising total of hours listening to their tutor talk in Tibetan on many subjects and in many situations. Gradually sound began to break through to meaning. Eventually their tutor became somewhat of a convert, admitting that their sound were very good, although the method was slow. In the end, he set up the perfect situation for such learning.

In late summer, when he was returning to his monastery, he arranged for Betty and Bob to visit his family in a village a day's ride beyond the border. They were to stay for a month during the mid-winter school break. A Tibetan guide would meet them in Taochow Old City and escort them to the home village. They were to bring no one who spoke Chinese. They must dress warmly, but the family would care for them. For a month they would hear nothing but Tibetan, spoken by men, women, and children, at all times and in all situations.

The monk also was able to make them understand that in such an all-Tibetan situation they had to have Tibetan names so Tibetans could address them properly. Furthermore, he had chosen two very good Tibetan names: Betty was Dorje Mtso; Bob was Sherab Dzondri ("persistent wisdom"). His

normally solemn face had a hint of mischievous delight when they were finally able to understand the details of the plan and respond to their names.

They kept the rendezvous in Old City, and a day of dawn-to-dusk riding brought them to the village, where they were met by generous and overwhelming hospitality. They had free access to the big combination living-room kitchen on the ground floor, but their own quarters consisted of one small room opening onto the roof of the main level. Their daily routine was that of the village. They sat happily in the sunshine before the afternoon dust storm blew up, and helped with whatever work there was to do. Always they were observing and being observed, visiting and being visited. Soon people from other villages joined in watching these foreigners. But whoever came and went, the promise was kept: Bob and Betty heard nothing but Tibetan.

It soon become evident to all that they were engaged in a learning process, and in time two literate villagers decided to teach them in the "proper" manner. Culling the letters of the alphabet from tracts, and putting them in proper order, they began drilling Bob and Betty in chanting the sounds. Scarcely realizing it, they found themselves beginning to read.

At mid-point in their stay they had an unexpected but welcome guest. Bob's cousin, Will Simpson, a missionary with the Assemblies of God, had head rumors of foreigners living in a Tibetan village, and curiosity sent him on a two-day ride to investigate. To his delight he found relatives. For them, too, it was delight, but also encouragement. At last they had met someone who heartily endorsed their mid-winter folly as being the only way to merge with Tibetan living and establish mutual confidence. He did, however, have qualms about Betty's participation, for he felt that no white woman could stand, or should even be asked to stand, such living. Hence he was a bachelor.

These qualms began to fade as he saw he reaction to the hardships of that life. Far from feeling like a martyr, Betty enjoyed it. As Will watched, she lived on Tibetan food without complaint and helped the women in their chores. Will's qualms changed to admiration after they had ridden to nearby villages and roamed around the mountainside looking for gazelle. "Betty, you ride like a Tibetan-with no fear," he shouted as they quickened the pace to reach the home village before dusk.

Will taught them the fine points and taboos of Tibetan manners. Unconsciously he demonstrated them as he mingled with all who came, skillfully turning their stories, arguments, and even jokes into occasions to tell of Jesus, the Savior of all mankind, including Tibetans. He talked of encampments and tribes he had visited and others of which he had only heard. He placed them precisely as to location and environment, and explained the peculiarities. All of these could be reached, as Will saw it, if good friends were found and if one operated within the Tibetan host/sponsor and guest/client relationships. Bob and Betty would need to cultivate those relationships. They would need to take certain precautions on the trail and when they chose campsites. Above all, they would need to trust in God's protection and refuse to panic, no matter what was happening. In this way they would be able to carry the Gospel to those tribes, encampments, villages, and kingdoms. The land would open, and somewhere, sometime, somehow, the breakthrough would come.

On the final morning of their stay there were farewells and pleas that they return soon. In the evening of that same day Bob and Betty rode into the mission compound at Old City. They were sun-tanned, smoke-tinged, butter-greased, and well dusted by the afternoon storm. The warm welcome was marked by relief that they were quiet unharmed, only much in need of baths.

Four days later they were in Titao, getting there in time for the start of the spring school term. The unthinkable had become an open secret, and there were many attempts at persuasion. Even in Bob's own mind there was hesitation. There was personal satisfaction in his easy command of the Chinese language, for it was a pivotal factor in his role as messenger of the Truth. In becoming a messenger to the Tibetans, he would exchange that fluency for a beginner's attempts to manipulate a half-learned language in an offensive accent. Furthermore, in all his contacts with the Chinese he seemed to be Chinese himself. But this would be of no advantage in dealing with the Tibetans, for they did not particularly like the Chinese. There could be no easy move from one culture to another. It would be a long time, if ever, before a Tibetan would exclaim, "Half-Tibetan, you! You resemble us so much that you must have been a real Tibetan in your previous incarnation!"

But with the assurance that came from their mid-winter experiment, and against all those very reasonable objections, Bob and Betty formally

asked to become candidates for Tibetan work. The committee made no immediate decision, and the matter was held over. Then in midsummer of 1925 their son David was born in the China Inland Mission's Borden Memorial Hospital in Lanchow. Bob rode all the following night to reach Titao in time to take his place as secretary of the Executive Committee. The first item put into minutes said that the Ekvalls were to move to Old City. Bob was to supervise and guide the church; both were to study Tibetan. Bob was also to remain as principal of the Bible School, and was to make a quick trip to Titao every six weeks to check on the running of the school.

They would be poised on the ethnic border, learning to be God's messengers to the Tibetans. God willing, they might even have the chance to take the witness to that new land, to its monasteries, villages, encampments, tribes, and kingdoms-beyond the Min Shan barrier. Against all reason, the unthinkable was becoming reality.

Preparations

Six weeks after David's birth, the Ekvall family rode into an incredulous and startled welcome in the mission compound at Old City. It had not been the custom for an entire missionary family to travel on horseback with such a young child. But this six-day trip from Lanchow was not a weird stunt or reckless experiment on their part. Rather, it was a response to a real need as they looked into the future. Common sense predicted that they, as a family, probably would not be able to do so much traveling until David was old enough to ride without help. Yet they had seen Tibetan children carried on horseback easily and in all kinds of weather. Why couldn't they do the same? So, dressed in Tibetan clothing, Bob carried David as the Tibetans carried their little ones, snuggled in the fold of his big leather cloak. Tightly belted around the hips, this coat lapped across to the side, forming a roomy pouch at the front at which a child nestled like a baby kangaroo.

Their old Tibetan teacher came back, delighted that books had finally appeared, yet still willing to talk at length about everything. Committed to being like the Tibetans, they sat cross-legged with him on rugs on the floor as they had their lessons, preparing for life in a chair-less society.

In a meeting with the local church committee, Bob presented their commitment to life and work among the Tibetans, asking for the help and advice of those who lived so near Tibetans and knew so much about them. Su Da, a man of some wealth, attended the meetings as an unofficial observer. He had had years of experience as a trader in the communities just beyond the Min Shan. He said little, but stared thoughtfully and lingered afterwards to assure Bob that he would visit soon and talk about the Tibetans. Something which might mean much in the future had begun.

True to his word, Su Da came a few days later to talk. Without openly disagreeing with Bob's plans, he told Bob of all the Tibetans near Old City among whom Bob and Betty could work and witness. But there was nothing he told Bob which he did not already know from boyhood experience and first-hand knowledge. These villages were so much under the pressure of Chinese culture that the inhabitants were called "half-Tibetans." Bob pointed out, "This is a logical place for the Taochow church to work. You are strong; you are active; some of you even speak Tibetans. You should become a missionary church."

Somewhat wryly Su Da conceded that it was something to think about. But when Bob went on to tell him where he and Betty wanted to go on the other side of the mountains; Su Da shook his head in dismay. They wanted to visit Dragsgumna, the closest village in the Tebbu area. Then they wanted to go on to Lhamo, at the edge of the grasslands, and maybe even press on the Ngawa! He protested that there was no Chinese law to protect them. Their passports would be useless. There were robbers everywhere. Some areas were wildly savage. Had Bob forgotten that only ten years earlier a huge band of Tebbus had come across the mountains to try and wipe out the missionaries in Luba? Particularly the Drangwa tribe, halfway between Dragsgumna and Lhamo, should be avoided.

After much discussion Su Da made two suggestions. When his host/sponsor from Dragsgumna came to Taochow, he would bring him to meet Bob and they could become friends. Also it would be good for Bob to visit the Muslim New Sect headquarters and get acquainted with their business manager and caravan leaders. They traveled widely and were well qualified to give advice. Su Da left, shaking his head. But both he and Bob knew that he had become a part of whatever venture would take Bob and Betty beyond the border.

There were Tibetans in Taochow at all seasons of the year, but it was particularly in the late fall and early winter that the grain-buying caravans of the high-pasturage nomads made their yearly trek. Living on the high grasslands as they did, the nomads depended on grain brought from the border for their staple food, *tsamba*. The New Sect headquarters were overrun with Tibetans. Every corner was full of the equipment of numerous yak caravans. The manager was too busy to talk, yet gave permission to Bob to wander freely among the campfires and tents of the Tibetan traders. The Tibetans offered tea from the steaming kettles, and joked in language which Bob could barely understand. Something about “hair yellow, eyes blue” seemed to be a particularly good joke. His questions about travel conditions were answered in detail. On his part, he urged them, “Come to my house. Drink tea in my house, which is nearby.”

Back at the mission station, Bob told the gatekeeper that Tibetans were to be warmly welcomed at any time, and that food and tea were to be ready on short notice. For the next few days their language study was interrupted by curious visitors. Most had no interest in drinking the

foreigners' tea, but showed great interest in the foreigners themselves, and how they lived. References to yellow hair and blue eyes brought laughter, but Betty's dark brown hair and even darker eyes brought thumbs-up endorsement. This tribute was repeated throughout the years ahead, while Bob was to learn that yellow hair and blue eyes were the marks of certain demons in Hell!

Among those who came, quite unexpectedly, was their own particular guest/client, the young monk from Charkhi. It was a happy reunion. He stayed for several days, then went with Bob to Titao. Bob was on one of his regular trips, while the monk wanted to see the big city and buy goods for trading.

In Titao Bob found, as he had expected, that the Bible School was functioning very well without his supervision. There really was no need for his regular trips. On Sunday he was invited to preach in the morning service. He spoke of the core of the Gospel message, and of Jesus' command to take the Good News to all people-a command which included the Tibetans. Speaking as a member of the church where he had been baptized as a child, he pleaded with the church to become a missionary church. The Ekvall family needed the prayers of the Titao church, but there should come a time when the church would send out some of its own members to work among the "wild Tibetans."

Bob's Tibetan friend had attended the service and, dressed in his monk's red robes, was well aware of the attention that focused on him. At the end of the service he pushed his way to the front. Speaking in Tibetan he declared, "Sherab Dzondri, you know that the Chinese won't come to the Tibetans to talk the Jesus religion. When they come, all they want is trade and wealth." He said this very slowly so that Bob would be sure to understand. Then he switched to Chinese and said, "Speaking Chinese you talk the Jesus religion very, very well."

When Bob returned to Old City, Betty had much to tell him. After he had left for Titao, the gatekeeper had barred the gate. But she had ordered it opened as a sign of welcome to all comers. They came in large numbers, while she served as hostess.

"They really liked my hair and eyes because of the resemblance to theirs," she said, "and I think they said that I have good looks. Some of the

women said that you should give me silver, coral, turquoise, and amber so I can braid my hair in Tibetan style and wear wealth hanging down my back. What happened to you, and who complimented you while you were gone? I learned a lot of Tibetan!"

"She's coming along very well in Tibetan to get all that information and those compliments," Bob thought as he responded with the tale of his trip.

Throughout the winter the flow of Tibetan visitors varied but never really stopped. Bob got on with the task of getting proper Tibetan clothes and boots, suitable for the winter cold at that altitude. All of these had to be made to order, for there were no clothing stores. From time to time both of them would visit one of the nearby villages, meeting with both Chinese and "half-Tibetan" believers. Their farthest venture was to the village where they had spent a month during the previous winter. It was a homecoming in which the entire village took part, laughing and joking about Bob and Betty's efforts at speech the year before.

A particularly affectionate interest focused on little David. Indeed, throughout their travels as a family, they found the same interest and tenderness. Two facts seemed to contribute to this. First, the birth rate among the nomads was very low, and children were highly valued. Second, although Chinese and Muslim traders traveled widely, they seldom took their wives along, and never their children. A family had an instant appeal, and a little child was a special sign that Bob and Betty were there as something other than traders. That family was also an example of the family life that Jesus blessed, but which the religion of the Tibetans, with its thousands of unmarried monks, looked down on as an inferior state.

The contact with the manager of the New Sect trade headquarters continued, and produced some day-long sessions with men who had spent half their lives traveling among the Tibetans. They talked about topographical details and the character of tribes and monasteries. They emphasized the places where good host/sponsors could be found. They told of the personalities and powers of local rulers. They described in detail the techniques of travel, precautions along the trail, and the special equipment that we necessary for travel among the nomad tribes. At times their descriptions were frustratingly vague, for they described distances in terms of days or half-days, while directions were "up" or "down" without

reference to points on the compass. Among other matters, the Drangwa tribe was becoming a recurrent and somewhat threatening echo.

Along with the advice, the manager also promised to make two important arrangements. He would send a message to his agent in the Gurdu monastery at Lhamo. This agent was to introduce Bob to the monastery steward, who would probably accept Bob and Betty and take them in after such an introduction. He would also send a message to the agent in Ngawa; if the Ekvalls finally arrived, he might be able to help them. The difference between the two messages was disturbingly suggestive: Lhamo was reasonably safe, but Ngawa was risky.

Su Da was tireless in help, scouting for hard-to-find pieces of equipment and testing everything from the standpoint of his long experience. The list of equipment including tents, saddles, leather saddlebags, leather bellows for keeping a fire burning, horse-shoeing gear, iron hobbles with locks to frustrate horse thieves, and all sorts of smaller things for gifts. He also brought Bob his special friend from the Dragsgumna monastery, a white-haired monk named Dontro Jamtsen. Following Su Da's introduction and the ritual exchange of scarves and gifts, Dontro Jamtsen took the responsibility of being Bob's host/sponsor, promising a hearty welcome if he ever came to Dragsgumna.

In Old City, Bob and Betty had unexpected companionship. Torsten and Elna Halldorf, missionaries of the Swedish Pentecostal Mission, were spending a year there in language study before going to another area for work. Torsten was trying to learn Chinese, Tibetan, and English simultaneously. Elna was under less pressure; she had learned English in Sweden, and had an extra year of Chinese study behind her. Together they made a remarkable couple and the truest of friends. As they visited back and forth sharing their problems and hopes, it became obvious that the Halldorfs longed to go with the Ekvalls, but hesitated to ask. Sensing their eagerness, Bob brought up the matter and all decided to make it a joint venture. The Halldorfs brought with them a decided asset in the person of their servant Ding Go ("elder brother" Ding), who had traveled widely in Tibet and knew all the tricks and routines of such travel. Brash but extremely competent, fearing no hardship, he was soon to teach the ways of a new lifestyle and help both Ekvalls and Halldorfs become veterans.

Across the Min Shan

One of the most important rules for those traveling among the Tibetans is, "Don't tell when you're leaving, or what route you're taking." Robbers will pay cold cash for such information. So in late May 1926 the Ekvalls and Halldorfs slipped out of Old City as quickly and quietly as possible.

They followed the little stream that lay just outside the mission compound walls until they reached the Tao River, about five miles away. After crossing the river on the clumsy, flat-bottomed little ferry, they went downstream until they reached the valley which led to Kwangki Pass. In this valley, before starting up to the pass, they camped for the night. This was a new experience, done with what Bob later described as "enthusiastic ineptitude." Ding Go did his best to bring order out of chaos. Aku Rinpoche, their Tibetan teacher, had surprised them a few days earlier by announcing that he would go with them as far as Lhamo. He watched in quiet amusement.

Before dawn the next morning they started up the long climb to the pass, over twelve thousand feet above sea lever. The horses stopped every few yards, gasping for breath in the thin air. Then little David, riding in Bob's Tibetan cloak, realized that he had missed lunch, and let everyone know how hungry he was. He was simply handed over to Betty and, nestled inside her cloak, enjoyed his lunch as they climbed.

The pass was marked by a pile of loose stones with prayer flags bearing the ever-present *Ohm Mani Padme Hum* fluttering in the wind. Shouting "Gods wins!" Aku Rinpoche added one more stone to the pile; then everyone dismounted and started the long walk down the other side. (A Tibetan saying stated that it was a poor horse that couldn't carry its rider up a mountain, and a poor man who couldn't walk down.) The pass was both a geographical and psychological watershed. Behind them, all streams led to the Yellow River; in front of them, all streams eventually flowed into the Yangzte River. Behind them was the familiar, with strong, established Chinese churches; in front of them lay the unknown territory of Tibetan tribes, untouched by the Gospel.

The trail led into a narrow gorge where the towering cliffs drew closer and closer. At the lower end it was so narrow that there was no room for

both stream and trail. Ingeniously, the trail was built above the stream on logs that spanned the gap from wall to wall. Down, down, down they traveled for three hours until they came out into the Dragsgumna ("Stone Box") valley where five tiny villages nestled, surrounded by fields of barley and beans. Secure in their secluded valley, the villagers felt no need for walls or fortifications of any sort; the three entrances to their valley could be defended by a mere handful of men.

Aku Rinpoche rode off to the small monastery to find the monk who would serve as their host. It was not long before white-haired Aku Dontro arrived to show them where to camp, and to escort them to his living quarters for a meal. Almost everyone in the community came to see the strangers. There was curiosity, but no hostility. And from woman came the exclamation, "Look-a foreign baby! Ah, compassion!"

Their host urged them to eat until they could eat no more. Then, as Ekvalls and Halldorfs were preparing to leave, Aku Dontro turned and picked up one of their gifts, a Gospel of Mark. Looking intently at the cover, he took a carefully-wrapped packet from his cupboard, and unwrapped it. it was another copy of the same Gospel, worn by much handling. With amusement in his face and voice he made it clear that Bob should keep the second copy to give to someone else. "Ah, the beautiful letter," he said, "but hard to understand. And the meanings are different." His copy had been well-thumbed, perhaps by many, even though the meanings were hard to understand.

Bob started to say, haltingly, what was waiting to be said. But Aku Rinpoche broke in with his palms up in apology.

"Sherab Dzondri's custom of speaking is about the Yeshu religion, and the book is the story of Yeshu, who is faith's salvation of that religion." With that introduction he went on for many minutes explaining some meanings of the Gospel of Mark. But where Bob's attempts were halting, Aku Rinphoche's speech was smooth and natural. When he had finished, there was a low murmur of appreciation from his audience.

What had happened was weirdly paradoxical. In a Buddhist monastery, a Buddhist monk, prayer beads still in his hand, had preached the Good News to another Buddhist monk, probably to spare himself the

embarrassment of faulty Tibetan spoken by his pupil. When done, he had gone back to his muttered prayers, the beads still sliding through his fingers.

Back in camp, they were swamped with sight-seers for the rest of the daylight hours. One of them introduced himself as Atang, friend of Su Da the Old City merchant. Early the next morning he came to escort all, servants included, to his home for breakfast. The house was spacious and well-furnished; the food was first-rate; but Atang's wife was surprisingly vocal and unfriendly. Even her farewell, the customary "Slowly, slowly go," had more than a hint of "Good riddance!" No one would have guessed that, three years later, Atang would rent two small rooms to Edwin and Carol Carlson, or that, twelve years later, Atang's wife would be the first Tebbu ever to be baptized.

When the day came to leave, Aku Dontro brought a young man who would escort the group to Jangtsa, where another friend would take over to guide them the rest of the way to Lhamo. That night they camped in a secluded hollow, where the guide urged them to burn only dry firewood, which would make less smoke. He himself climbed to the top of a nearby hill, from where he could watch the approaches to the camp. The next morning he warned that there would be no noon halt. They had to move as quickly as possible, for they were going to cross the valley of the Drangwa tribe-robbers who did not obey even their own chief and who would go on raids without telling him their plans.

Passage across the valley was almost without incident. Although they could see villages and fields far down the valley, they met only one man, who could do no more than sling stones at them. Cold and miserable, they reached Jangtsa after riding for ours through pouring rain and driving hail. They left Jangtsa at daybreak on the following morning, under the leadership of a new guide. After miles of travel through a narrow gorge, they came into a wider part of the valley, where they no longer had to ride in single file.

Then they saw them. Eight riders, all armed, had come around a bend several hundred yards ahead. Their guns came off their backs as they rode toward the Ekvalls and Halldorfs at a rapid trot.

"Robbers," growled the guide. His rifle came off his back onto the saddlebow in one swift motion. Betty swung her horse close to Bob's and reached for the baby. Then Bob reached for his rifle.

"Go slowly, slowly. Don't try to run and don't try to turn back." The guide's warning was urgent, and Bob remembered what Will Simpson had said: "Secure in God's protection, never panic under any circumstances."

"Show the guns," ordered the guide. Then he and Bob rode towards the robbers, keeping between them and the rest of the group. The robbers slowed down, then halted in indecision. They had expected panic, flight and easy pickings.

"Tibetan, you," shouted someone, "where do you come from and what are you foreigners doing here?"

"From Jangtsa, which is very near, and I travel with my guests." There was an implied threat in his words. Then the robbers shifted to one side, and the group passed behind Bob and the guide, who still stayed between robbers and intended victims.

"Jangtsa boy," someone yelled, "go home and leave the foreigners and their belongings to us." The guide didn't answer, only significantly shifted his rifle.

"Let's go!" shouted an authoritative voice, and they were gone-headed for the gorge at a full gallop.

"They may return," warned the guide, so he and Bob waited until, without a word, the guide slung his rifle onto his back. Then they rode to catch up with the rest of their group.

With hearts full of thanks they continued up the valley until the full panorama of Taktsang Lhamo ("Tiger's Den Goddess") with its two monasteries and satellite trading posts spread before them. Here there were no fields of grain, no tree-covered slopes. At an altitude of over twelve thousand feet the growing season was too short and the nights too cold for agriculture. The valley ended at the foot of a great rocky peak, still snow-capped. Somewhere up a narrow gorge was the source of the stream which served as the boundary between the rival monasteries, Gurdu and Sechu.

Without further ado, now that Lhamo was in sight, the guide said goodbye. With a half-smile and upturned thumb in approval of Bob's conduct, he muttered something about "Son untamed, you!"

It was the sort of encouragement Bob needed. They were about to approach a monastery where they had no sponsor, no letter of introduction, not even an oral message to pave the way. Nor could they look for the New Sect agent before they had presented themselves to the authorities of the Gurdu monastery. With his red monk's robes Aku Rinpoche gave some degree of acceptability, but at the ford he turned aside, saying he was going to see a friend in the Sechu monastery. He would see them later.

Lhamo

They stopped beside a small spring, where they had a quick lunch and prepared a gift, several yards of silk, some cotton cloth, a packet of raisins, and an extra-large silk scarf of blessing. One of their helpers, a Chinese man who claimed to have lived in Lhamo, rode ahead with the gift to make the initial contact with the *nyerwa* (steward) and to ask permission to camp for a few days.

By the time they reached the "Great House" where all official business was transacted, there were a number of monks at the gate. These greeted the Ekvalls and Halldorfs with good will, and pointed out where they could camp. Other servants of the steward came with fuel-a small log and several baskets of dried dung. More than anything else, this showed that they were now out of the land of firewood and at the edge of the grasslands. Soon a message came to call Bob and Torsten to have tea in the official guest room.

In the reception room the steward, Aku Gomchok, noted the gift Bob had sent, then sat back and watched in silence as Bob and Torsten were served tea and boiled mutton. Finally the conversation began with the standard greeting to a newly-arrived traveler. "Any trouble on the way?" He looked as if he was enjoying a private joke, and Bob was sure that he had heard of the encounter with the robbers. The standard reply to such a question, regardless of the facts, is "No trouble at all!" Bob's evasive reply, "We have arrived safe and in peace at the Gurdu Great House" drew a grin which was almost laughter.

Then came the important questions: Who were they really? Where had they come from? Why were they traveling among the Tibetans? Where were they hoping to go? And most essentially, why had they come to Lhamo? Aku Gomchok joked about the fact that though Bob and Torsten looked alike, they spoke different languages. Torsten had only two names, while Bob had three, an English one, a Chinese one, and a Tibetan one. He spoke approvingly of Bob's name, but commented that merely having a Tibetan name didn't make one a Tibetan.

Aku Gomchok laid down the ground rules for their stay. They could "speak religion" outside the monastery, but not inside. As guest/client they could stay as long as they wanted, and would be supplied with fuel. They

were free to walk anywhere in Gurdu territory, though no mention was made of rival Sechu monastery. Then he gave an order to a monk: "Go and tell the foreign women to come and drink tea. And bring the baby, ah, compassion on it."

Blue-eyed blond-haired Alma and dark-eyed dark-haired Betty soon arrived, in some puzzlement and even nervousness. But they were treated with great courtesy, though Aku Gomchok muttered to himself, "Foreigners come in several colors!" He asked their names, complimented Betty on having a Tibetan one, and joked that, with her dark hair and eyes, she must be half-Tibetan.

They stayed for five days outside the door of the Gurdu Lama's Great House, days filled with visitors. There was no open hostility from laymen, though some monks frowningly refused even to look at the tracts offered to them. Other, however, stayed to read and ask questions. Bob was constantly asking individuals about their tribes or home villages: how far away were they, and in which direction? He soon realized that Lhamo was a true center and gathering place for an enormous number of the people of the black tents. The New Sect agent pointed out the eight main trails leading out of Lhamo, carefully explaining where they went. He also emphasized that each one passed through an area haunted by robbers. In fact, Lhamo was so ringed by bad robber country that sometimes not a single trader got in for two or more months. Travelers should always be on their guard, flaunt their weapons, and "show toughness."

During their stay they had a graphic demonstration of the dangers of travel when a Taochow merchant came into camp wearing only a pair of boots and a ragged Tibetan coat. It was only through someone's charity that he wore anything at all, for ten miles outside Lhamo he had been attacked by robbers. They had jumped him before he had time to get his rifle off his back, and taken everything he had, including his clothes.

Throughout their stay thus far, the Ekvalls and Halldorfs had refrained from crossing the stream to Sechu territory. But they were surprised one day to receive word that the Sechu lama wanted "all the foreigners" to come "drink tea" in his house. Such an invitation could not be refused, though it might mean offending their Gurdu hosts.

The Sechu lama was embarrassingly cordial. Apparently many years earlier he had been befriended by the missionaries in Old City, and had stayed at the mission for several days. "Those foreigners," he said, "had never even heard of Taktsang Lhamo, and now these foreigners are here. Even with a baby! Maybe they will live in Lhamo!" He laughed aloud at the idea. He was only joking, but it was good to hear such talk. When he heard, however, that the foreigners wanted to go to Samtsa, he turned serious. Because he had been helped by foreigners, speaking of religion, he would help these foreigners, also speakers of religion. In two days his servant would escort them to Samtsa and turn them over to his good friend Dzopa Duggersjip, a man of great influence. With that settled, they began a long and lavish meal.

No sooner had they arrived back at their camp than a monk appeared to say that Bob, and Bob alone, was invited to drink tea with Aku Gomchok. Aku Gomchok was most polite as he exchanged the customary ceremonial scarves with Bob. Then, having dismissed all the attendants, he leaned forward and asked, "Well, then, what did the Sechu lama say?" Surprise showed on his face when Bob replied, "He said that if we live in Lhamo he will help us." Bob also told him that they were going to Samtsa, and would be turned over to Duggersjip. "Ah, the old fatty, Dzo Dug! He is a son untamed, with a straight mouth and a good heart." Both thumbs went up in endorsement.

After some further talk, Bob told him that they wanted to go from Samtsa to visit "the Ngawa kind and queen." Gomchok's immediate response was the promise of an official letter of introduction to "the queen and king." Bob's puzzlement at the reversed titles must have been obvious, for Gomchok added, "The queen is the daughter of the line and where the power is. The king is only a Golok chieftain. It is advantageous for you to know this."

The morning came when they broke camp as the daily crowd gathered. There were farewells: "Be careful; go slowly, slowly" (that is, with dignity). Aku Gomchok himself graced the scene and gave his own farewell, adding that the ferrymen at the Back River crossing would be instructed to take good care of them, since they were guests of the Gurdu Great House. As they rode toward the pass, Taktsang Lhamo dropped behind them. With a freshened sense of a loving Father's care, they were again on their way, God willing, to Ngawa.

Duggur Steps In

Four hours of riding took them to the top of a pass from which they could see hundreds of square miles of hills, valleys, and great rounded mountains with not a single tree or even clump of shrubbery. These were the true grasslands, the home of the nomads of the black tents. They stopped by a spring where the grass was thick, and had a leisurely lunch while their guide rode ahead to warn Duggersjip of the arrival of guests.

The entire trip had been one of firsts. This was their first encounter with the people of the black tents, but there were no tents. Instead, there were huts of walls daubed with dung and having sod roofs. These were the winter quarters of the Samtsa tribe, and were referred to as "tents."

Duggersjip, about 55 years old and fat as a laughing Buddha, was casually friendly. Beyond the customary "Any trouble on the trail?" there was no barrage of questions. The mistress of the tent, a middle-aged woman with a quantity of silver, turquoise, and coral in the headdress hanging down her back, poured tea without words or even a smile. She did unbend enough to mutter "Ah, compassion!" to the baby as she served the basic butter, cheese, and tsamba.

Following this lunch, Duggursjip surprised them by saying, "Let the servants pitch the tents. You four come and drink tea in the little tent." The "little tent" was indeed smaller, but cozier and more inviting than the big one. As they seated themselves around the fire, a good-looking woman with much less wealth on her headdress served them with warm friendliness. Duggur himself, more relaxed, became more talkative. "Two wives take care of me, and see how well fed I am! But two wives can't live in the same tent, so I have two tents, Ama Doko in the big tent, and Troroma in the little tent. Both tents are mine, and both wives are mine."

Aku Rinpoche left the following day to go to the Shetsang monastery after giving Bob two pieces of advice. First, Bob was to wait for three days until a messenger came. He would tell Bob where and when to meet his friend, who would then escort them all to Ngawa. Second, Bob should listen to his host, Duggersjip, and take his advice at all times. Betty held the bridle of Aku Rinpoche's horse, as she had seen housewives do for departing guests. Settling into the saddle, he leaned forward and patted her on the shoulder, urging, "Keep talking Tibetan all the time, ah, son, untamed-female, you!"

On the following day Bob and Duggur rode out at dawn to stand guard over the sheep of the encampment. Bob realized well that this was simply a way for Duggur to get him all to himself for a day. Settled on a hillside overlooking the grazing sheep, he began to question Bob. He wanted to know about the ocean: was it fresh or salty? He wanted to know why Bob's compass pointed north. How did the altimeter work? Why did his binoculars magnify a distant object? At the same time, he taught Bob. The gazelle that Bob shot was divided equally, for they were "kettle partners." He clarified for Bob many of the aspects of personal and social relationships. But to Bob's attempts to talk about the Good Shepherd, Duggur's response was, "All religions are good; yours for you, and mine for me. But they are truly different. I don't need yours and you don't need mine. There is nothing more to be said."

Back at camp at the end of the day, there was disappointing news. The messenger from Aku Rinpoche had arrived ahead of schedule with a cold and brutal message: the caravan would not take them to Ngawa; the lama of Sokhtsong, who controlled the ferry across the White River, did not like foreigners; the road was too dangerous and long; they had made friends in Lhamo and Santsa; now they should go home. In Tibetan style, the messenger repeated the message twice, then asked if Bob and Duggur had understood it.

The instructions seemed completely reasonable. Yet Bob and Betty were not sure that they should be satisfied with what had been accomplished. After supper that night, Duggur posed the prime question, asking why they so much wanted to go to Ngawa. He brushed off everything about preaching the Gospel, then asked what hope they had that the Ngawa royalty would receive them. In answer, Bob brought out Aku Gomchok's letter.

Thoughtfully turning the letter over in his hands, Duggur had the last word. "If Boat Boy Aku Gomchok, rebel who plays wild games, thinks he can send you to the Mei Royalty in Ngawa, then I can send you to my friend the Tang Kor Lama in Sokhtsong. Do you really want to go? Then go! You'll stay with friends of mine in Bu and Shami. Say Duggursjip sent you, and you can go all the way. The lama at Sokhtsong is a very special friend of mine, and for my sake he'll take you in. Why let an old woman like Rinpoche scare you?

Torsten had been hesitant. But when this had been translated into English and then Swedish, he dropped all objections. "Ja, *ja*…God's will…we must go on."

Very early on the fourth day they started out. The guide scouted restlessly, alternately staying behind to see whether they were being followed, and riding ahead to check for ambushing robbers. At the top of the first pass, over 13,500 feet in elevation, they could see the "great southern plain" spread below them. And far in the distance stretched a cluster of snowy peaks that Bob guessed would be over 20,000 feet high. Beyond was the territory of the Goloks; on this side was Ngawa.

They arrived at the Bu encampment at the worst possible time: dusk, when all the herds were arriving, and everyone was busy getting ready for night. But they found the tent of Slab Face Rinchen, who gave them a warm welcome. He was not simply accepting a friend of Duggur's, but was eager to show himself a true friend. It was the dark of the moon, and the night was very dark indeed. Men slept on the rim of the encampment, occasionally shouting defiance to thieves suspected of lurking nearby. Their shouts roused the encampment dogs, who added their hysterical baying to the commotion. Only when the moon was near full, and no thief would dare approach, was a Tibetan encampment peaceful at night.

After a very early start the next morning, they arrived at the Black River ferry before noon. Luggage was loaded into the flat-bottomed boat, while four horses pulled it across the river. The ferrymen were friendly, and urged the group to stay, for Aku Gomchok was a relative and had even worked the ferry in his early years. This explained the Boat Boy nickname. But they moved on to Shami. Here again they were hosted by a friend of Duggur's, who thus became a friend of Bob's, entitled to Bob's hospitality and protection in Taochow.

It was a day of wind, rain, sleet, and hail when they arrived at Sokhtsong, set on a bluff overlooking the Yellow River. There were the usual white-washed monks' quarters and a tiny chanting hall. Nothing more. Yet this monastery controlled the ferry and the roads with authority acknowledged far and near. The landscape seemed bleak, without even a bush in sight. But this was the only settlement between Lhamo and Ngawa. If a mission station was ever to be established in the grasslands, it would have to be Sokhtsong.

Their guide rode ahead to recite a message to the lama, while they waited in the pouring rain, wondering what sort of reception they would have. Bob knew that an explorer had been driven out with stones, and he had recently spoken with a Russian fur trader who had been denied shelter in the middle of a blizzard.

The lama received their gifts, including a Gospel of Mark, but was quite frank about his attitude. "I have always opposed foreigners, and have instructed the monks never to have anything to do with them. You know that no foreigners have ever been received here. But Duggursjip sent you, and he and I are like brothers. If you are Duggur's friends, you are my friends. So stay as long as you wish. Whenever you pass this way, you will find that Sokhtsong monastery is open to you. But don't give out any of these writings to the monks, because your religion and mine are antagonistic. How strange it is! Old Duggur knows I do not like foreigners, yet he sends me four, and a baby, for no reason."

The message from the lama also stated that he was unable to invite them to "drink tea," since he was leaving on a trip. Shortly after he left, a monk returned the Gospel, saying that the lama did not want it. Since it was a precious thing, however, he was returning it.

Bob could only agree to his conditions. Yet the lure of the forbidden brought monks who were curious to find out about this taboo topic. After all, there were no rules against talking!

Ngawa at Last

For several days they were forced to camp near the monastery because the ferry was being repaired. A delay at the ferry was nothing unusual. It was right at the junction of the White and Yellow Rivers, and was used for crossing either one. Trade caravans, pilgrims, and others were often delayed for days. Their campsite was a miserable place, swept by every storm, and with very little fuel for cooking or warmth. But there were others in the same situation. One group in particular was of interest, for it consisted of a monk and two laymen taking some thirty yak-loads of grain to Ngawa. Soon it was clear that it would be advantageous to travel together; the traders needed horsepower to get their goods across the river, and the Ekvalls and Halldorfs needed to be shown the route to Ngawa.

When the ferry was finally available, the crossing was a cooperative project. Since yak are useless for pulling a ferry, Bob's horses made extra trips across the river, pulling the flat-bottomed boat. The ferrymen were efficient, but openly hostile towards the foreigners. Yet a slight mishap gave Bob the chance to put them in dept to him. Somehow the single sculling oar slipped loose and started floating down the river. The shouts of dismay revealed that no one could swim, and the oar, in the treeless land, was precious. Shedding his clothes as he ran along the river bank, Bob plunged into the icy water. Chilled to the bone, he pushed it back to the ferry, where the men received it was a chorus of words of appreciation. At the end of the day they came with a gift of the finest cheese and, sitting around the first, joked about the resemblance between the foreigners and otters. More significantly, they assured Bob that he would always be a preferred client at their ferry.

Travel with a trading caravan was a new experience. The day began at dawn, and travel ended by noon so that the animals could graze for the rest of the day. But the long afternoons gave opportunity for talk with their traveling companions. Here they learned more about the district to which they were headed. The Ngawa royalty followed in the tradition of early rulers of Tibet, who had governed the country a thousand years earlier. The hereditary monarchy supported the Buddhist religion and its observances, encouraged education of their subjects, ruled sternly and opposed violence, and encouraged both local and long-distance trade. The territory of the kingdom extended along the Ngawa valley so that it would take a man on a swift horse at least five days to cover it. In addition, many surrounding

tribes, though independent, gave allegiance to Ngawa in return for protection, for Ngawa could raise an army of ten thousand horsemen within three days.

But the question still remained: would they be welcomed in Ngawa, or be driven out as unwanted intruders?

The caravan crawled along, moving from the plain of the Yellow River valley into a maze of low hills, ever higher and higher. The monk was not taking his caravan of yak into the main Ngawa valley, but was going to detour through high country to reach his monastery. He promised, however, to show Bob a branch trail which would lead to the royal summer encampment. If the royal family was there, the journey would be shorter.

The last night before they parted from the monk was a dark one, filled with wind, torrential rain, and noise as the rain drummed on the tents. In the morning they discovered that they had visitors during the night. Tracks showed that at least two riders had come up to the camp and left with one of Torsten's horses, the only one without locking hobbles. The experience was disconcerting. For three days they had seen no sign of human activity. Yet, without being aware of it, they had been followed and watched by horsemen waiting for the moment of opportunity.

With some misgivings about getting lost, they turned off at the side trail, but soon spotted herds of horses whose herders gave precise directions to the royal encampment. The queen and king were not at the camp, but the camp manager, being told of a letter of introduction, gave a proper but lukewarm reception.

Because supplies were running low it seemed best to the Ekvalls and Halldorfs to leave two servants, their tents, and the weaker horses at the summer encampment. Taking two servants and cutting baggage to the barest minimum, they would make a quick trip to the central valley, where they hoped to make contact with the queen and king.

They had been told that a herdsman would guide them to the top of the high pass and point out the way, but unexpectedly the manager himself announced that he would be their companion. The pass was over 14,000 feet in elevation. At the foot of the steep descent there was a meadow at the start of a side valley. There the manager left them, telling them to make a long

halt, long enough to boil at least two kettles of tea, so the horses could fill up. Pasturage near the palace was poor, he explained.

His advice was good, though it was only a flimsy excuse. It was obvious that he wanted to reach the palace early enough to report in detail all that he knew about the strangers.

There was no possibility of getting lost; the directions were to follow the stream to the main valley and then turn right. Ngawa, which they reached that afternoon, was a broad valley unlike anything seen previously. The houses looked like blocks of sun-dried mud, two to three stories tall. These were not grouped in villages, but set among the family fields. There were no trees. Looming forebodingly was the fortress-like palace.

The palace had to be approached first, for if they were going to be allowed to stay in Ngawa, they had to make contact with the queen and kind. Handing over their letter of introduction to the official at the gate, they waited. A crowd gathered around them, but there were no greeting; everyone waited to see how the royal couple would respond to these outsiders. Finally the steward returned with word that the queen and kind, busy in performance of worship, would not be free until the next day. Meanwhile the foreigners could camp in one of the standard campsites, and had the use of a tent from the palace.

Until they were summoned by the royal couple, they could do nothing but wait. Eventually the instructions came: the foreigners were to come to the palace. One of the Chinese traders offered to go with Bob and Torsten to act as interpreter, if necessary. Inside the iron-studded door huge dogs lunged furiously, kept by their heavy chains for vicious attack. The palace was a strange combination of stables, storehouses, and temple. Balconies were lined with great prayer-wheels, which servants kept spinning as they went about their work.

The royal audience began with the formal presentation of gifts, including several yards of satin brocade, of older of California views, and a Tibetan New Testament. After a long silence the queen spoke.

“In that letter which you brought from the Gurdu Great House-“

“Boat Boy Gomchok had something to do with that letter,” interrupted the king.

"Certainly Boat Boy had a part," she replied. "He probably wrote it. It is like him, and he carries the Gurdu seal."

Turning to Bob she continued, "It was indeed said that you were not traders, yet had foreign wisdom and wanted to visit the Mei royalty and the kingdom of Ngawa. Why did you want to visit us?"

Drawing on his best Tibetan, Bob replied, "The merchants in Old City told me that Ngawa was the most important place in Tibetan country: a place where the rulers were fierce yet wise, where the whole land was orderly and at peace."

In amused mockery she replied, "Flattery. Tell me truly why you travel in Tibetan country when you could live comfortably in China."

This was the basic question, to which there was but one answer. "We speakers of religion must travel and give witness to the truth of the Yeshu religion so that Tibetans also may have faith and know salvation's way. In our gift are our scriptures. In Ngawa, where everyone reads, the book will make it clear."

The queen picked up the New Testament and began to read the first page, frowning and muttering, "Many names, no meaning." Nevertheless she read on and on, turning pages slowly or quickly, skipping or re-reading. 'In the beginning was the word…' now this makes sense." Finally she came to the last verse: "Yes, come Lord Yeshu."

"Very strange," she commented. "All about Yeshu, his power, his love, and his doctrine, but that letter said nothing about your religion."

As they talked the atmosphere grew friendlier. Then the queen asked, "Why don't you bring the others, your wives? Would they come if you sent for them? And the baby, of course." Here the king interrupted: "If a messenger goes to call your wives, could he bring back your firearms? I like guns, and I hear that yours are unusual." Soon the queen was happily involved with Betty, Elna, and especially David, while Bob and Torsten went up to the roof of the palace with the king for some impromptu target shooting, particularly with Bob's double-barreled shotgun.

It was only minutes after their return to camp that the crowds began coming. The missionaries had been received at the palace and were now recognized as guest/clients of the royal family. The ordinary laymen were

curious and unusually courteous, in contrast to the rough and sometimes surly attitude of the nomads around Lhamo. They were also surprisingly literate. They read avidly whatever was offered, but were careful to return all the "writings," only a few elderly monks took the tracts away with them. The presence of Betty and Elna meant that many women almost camped at the tent door. David particularly touched a soft spot.

It was clear that Ngawa was the gateway to several other areas. Going up the valley one came to the territory of Golok tribes; down the valley, outside Ngawa territory, lived aboriginal tribes. These clans spoke their own languages, different from both Chinese and Tibetan, and were noted, even among the Tibetans, for their savagery.

Two contacts seemed particularly significant. The first was a middle-aged monk, who insisted that he wanted a private talk. Out of earshot and sitting opposite Bob on the ground, he wasted no time telling Bob that he hated the monasteries and would gladly bring trouble and disaster to them.

"You and I should work together, you with foreign magic and the power of your religion, and I with my courage, for I am a 'son untamed.' Together we could cause much trouble for the monasteries, you and I."

Completely startled, Bob knew instinctively that it was a trap. Rising to end the conversation, Bob told the monk that, as a speaker of the Yeshu religion, he was bringing the way of salvation to the Tibetan people, not bringing strife and violence. The monk returned to camp with Bob, but soon disappeared.

The second contact was a particularly inquisitive young teenager in a neat but ordinary sheepskin coat. In moments he was inside the tent playing with David, reading aloud from the tracts, and asking about instruments of "western magic." The compass and altimeter required difficult explanations, but the function of the binoculars was obvious. Questioned as to his name, he answered, "Hsiang Chung," then added, almost as an afterthought, "Mei royalty son."

Contact had been made. Their evening prayers were full of praise. They were actually in Ngawa, and the doors seemed wide open. A day later, however, they realized that something was different: there were no visitors at their campsite. Around noon the agent of the Taochow New Sect arrived in a state of near panic. According to reports, all the monasteries had been

demanding that they be permitted to attack, with weapons, to drive out the interlopers. The queen and king had refused this demand, and had proposed an alternative: by royal edict the foreigners would be ordered to leave immediately, with no promise of protection along the way.

"Never panic in any circumstance." This advice from Will Simpson certainly applied here. The natural impulse to saddle up and ride away would be the sign of fear. So, leaving the others behind to pray, Bob and Ding Go rode to the palace to inform the kind and queen that, because of time pressure, they were leaving on the following day and had come to express regretful farewells.

They had barely reached the gate of the palace when a tremendous storm, with hailstones the size of ping-pong balls, swept across the valley. The storm was so violent that for a few minutes they couldn't get across the courtyard and into the palace itself. Finally they ran across and went in to see the royal couple.

Inside the palace there was turmoil, with monks chanting and long-haired sorcerers shouting incantations to the accompaniment of drums, cymbals and horns. Quite without permission the king demanded, "Can you make storms like this?"

"No."

"Can you make this kind of storm stop?"

"No. But we who have faith can always pray to our all-powerful God."

The sound of the storm began to die away, and Bob was able to say the proper farewells. But there was no invitation for them to come again. In the lengthy formulas for farewell, Bob expressed the hope that "we three-wife, son and I" might return when they had more time.

The king hesitated, apparently not wanted to refuse outright. "It is a long way, and the trail is hard and dangerous. Don't come to stay, but if you are passing through while going somewhere else, naturally you can stop a day or so because we are friends. We are friends-like brothers. When I come to Taochow I will visit you. I hear that you may live at Lhamo. If so, I'll see you frequently, and whenever we meet we'll be friends, just like brothers."

The queen was blunt. “If you were a merchant, there would be no problem.” Gingerly she picked up the New Testament that Bob had given her. “This book is very good, very precious. It has great magic and power, but for us who have no faith it is dangerous.” The book had been thumbed from cover to cover, and it was with some reluctance that she handed it back to Bob. With the last words of farewell, she also had a word for Betty: “Take care of the little son-ah, compassion!!”

Evacuation

Departure the following day took place under a driving rain, with no onlookers other than a servant from the palace to say a polite but perfunctory farewell. The hasty departure was disappointing, yet they could recognize that they had reached Ngawa; the door was not standing open in welcome, but at least it was still ajar. Contact with the rulers had been made, and a relationship of some sort had been established.

They crossed the high pass in a full-fledged snowstorm, and were thoroughly wet and cold when they reached the royal summer camp, where they had left horses and tents. They had scarcely arrived when the manager of the royal tent came to invite them all to tea, not just the usual tea and tsamba, but a carefully prepared meal with meat, dumpling, sausage, fried bread, and sho. When he mentioned the sudden hailstorm, it was obvious that a messenger from the palace had made a night ride, and the manager was acting according to royal instructions.

Bargaining for a horse to replace the stolen one gave Bob the chance to see the royal herd of more that 300 excellent animals. The one he was able to buy, however, was not one of the royal horses; it was a small scraggly beast belonging to one of the herders, who almost gave it away as something only a “Chinese boy” would ride.

The camp manager repeatedly emphasized that the group would be safe all the way to Sokhtsong, and added that they should take the opportunity to visit and become guest/clients of the chiefs of the four tribes in the vicinity of the bend of the Yellow River. His insistence made it obvious that the idea had come from the queen and king. Here was an open door to a new area, but their supplies were running out; they had barely enough to get back to Old City. This frustration emphasized ideas which were slowly taking shape about how to travel among the nomads.

It took three days to reach the ferry, as they picked their way through an area of bogs, small lakes, and winding streams. Bob had not yet experienced the actual danger of going across the tribal territory without making human contact, yet instinctively felt ill at ease, as if he were walking across someone’s yard without so much as a gesture to the owner.

The ferrymen at the White River greeted them boisterously, suggesting that Bob go for another swim so they could see again how it was

done. The special treatment they received gave the feeling of being among friends.

At the Black River, however, things were different. There were reports of a band of armed men in the vicinity, and everyone was nervous. In fact, they showed up before Ekvalls and Halldorfs reached the river, and demanded a payoff of one hundred ounces of silver. When Bob refused, they crossed the river and settled down at a spot which covered they ferry landing and the trails which continued to Lhamo. The robbers were not local men, and laugher at the fact that they were dealing with guest/clients of the Gurdu Great House.

The deadlock continued for hours. The sun was high and hot. Time became very long. Finally the robbers saddled up and rode away on the Lhamo trail. When binoculars showed them climbing up the distant hillside, the ferrymen consented to take the group across. Safe at last in the tent of Slab Face Rinchen, Bob found himself something of a celebrity. Details, some grossly exaggerated, of the robber incident spread quickly throughout the encampment. Friends of Rinchen dropped in to congratulate the foreigner who had not only become a guest/client of the Soktsong lama and the Ngawa royalty, but had also driven off a lawless band that had haunted that region for days.

Bob and Betty's feelings as they rode into Lhamo were completely different from those of a month earlier. They now had friends to welcome them. They were no longer strangers who wondered if they would even be allowed to stay. Betty summed up the second arrival in a single sentence: "It seems as though we belong in Lhamo."

Forty-nine days after leaving home they arrived back at the mission station in Old City, tired, hungry, and dirty. The church welcomed them back, eager to hear details. After all, there had been no contact for well over a month. This was also a time to ponder the results of the trip. They had crossed the barrier of the Min Shan and reached villages, had crossed the barrier of the Min Shan and reached villages, encampments, tribes, monasteries, and even a kingdom, all of which had never been touched. They had heard of even more totally unreached areas. How should they take advantage of these opportunities?

This question was partially answered later that year when they hosted the annual conference. At that time the executive committee made three

decisions relating to the Ekvalls. First, Bob was relieved of all responsibility in the Titao Bible School. Second, he was to take whatever steps were possible to strengthen relationships with the Gurdu lamasery in hopes of being able to settle there. Third, he could begin to buy a yak or *mdzo* (yak-cow hybrid) caravan. This final decision was the only one which caused much argument, for it marked a basic change in travel methods. Instead of making hurried dashes with overloaded horses and mules, they would have a larger caravan with yak to carry the heavy load of food, trade goods, and gifts. Certainly travel would be slower, but it would be at the same pace as that of the Tibetan nomads.

In February 1927 Bob, Edwin Carlson, Francis Derk, and Will Simpson made another trip to Lhamo. It was a horrible journey. Temperatures fell to below zero, and on the pass across the Min Shan the snow was almost up to their stirrups. They took no tent. On the last night they camped in a driving blizzard, which left a foot of snow on the ground. Putting heavy blankets on the horses, they stacked all their gear in a circle inside which they built a fire and tried to sleep. All night they took turns standing guard, for they were still in the robber zone. At the end of a long cold day they arrived in Lhamo. A thin trail of steam marked where the stream, warm even in midwinter, flowed past the cloisters of the monastery. As they rode along they saw a number of the younger monks standing in the water to keep their feet warm!

Bob had been counting on Aku Gomchok's help in negotiating with the Gurdu Great House, but was surprised to find that he was no longer steward. In fact, he was no longer even a monk, having broken his vow of celibacy by sleep with the Ngawa queen. The missionaries, nevertheless, were received courteously and Will, as the one best acquainted with the fine points of Tibetan courtesy and oratory, brought up Bob and Betty's desire to live in Lhamo. In a way it was surprising that the authorities would even consider such a request, since their purpose in wanted to live there was freely expressed. Four days of discussion followed, during which it became clear that one reason for considering the request was the feeling that Bob's presence might be handy if the political turmoil in China should boil over into Tibetan areas. But there was no firm promise.

That turmoil affected them sooner than expected. From Lhamo they went down the valley towards Denga, where Edwin Carlson and Francis Derk hoped to establish friendly relationships. Just a few miles from Denga they met a messenger carrying a letter that told them that the United States

government was calling for the evacuation of all Americans from the interior of China. Bob was to attend an emergency meeting of the executive committee in Titao just three days later, and the normal travel time from where they were was six full days. Nevertheless, by carefully scheduling stops for rest and food, Bob arrived in Titao in time for breakfast on the day of the meeting.

The decisions regarding evacuation were generally routine, but momentous in establishing a new basis for mission and church relations. These had to be seen as separate organizations, so as to avoid the appearance of foreign control. Self-support, self-government, and self-propagation had to become more than mere slogans or ideals for both mission and national church. An executive committee of the Chinese church was already functioning, and soon became independent of the mission in fact as well as in name.

The evacuation itself proceeded by horseback, mule train, cart, and raft along separate routes and at various speeds through a war-torn land. The stories have largely been forgotten, yet not totally. Sixty years later (1987) I was chatting with an old Muslim in Lanchow. We were standing across the Yellow River from what had been the Borden Memorial Hospital. Pointing to the building, he commented, “There used to be English doctors at that hospital. One of them was drowned while going down the river on a raft.”

Return to Kansu

The unexpected furlough was a time of uncertainty for all, while many wondered if they would ever see China again. In the summer of 1928 the members of the Field Committee met in New York with William Christie and A. C. Snead to discuss and make plans. They decided that six couples designated for Tibetan and Muslim work, should return to China and try to reach the Kansu-Tibetan border.

In these days of jet travel, it is hard to realize that a journey such as this could take almost four months. Crossing the Pacific together were the Ekvalls, Carlsons, Griebenows, Koenigswalds, and Holtons-ten adults and five children (including the writer). The Fesmires had left a little earlier, and met the rest of the group in Hankow. But Hankow was a long way from Kansu. For a time the American consular authorities flatly refused to allow the party to leave. Only after much argument did they modify the prohibition into a very grudging at-your-own-risk permission. But American permission wasn't enough. The Chinese military commander at the major railroad center would not accept the responsibility for letting them go on, while the manager of the railroad insisted, truthfully, that there was no passenger service.

A journey to regional military headquarters finally produced the necessary passes, complete with official red stamps. At this point the railroad provided a boxcar for the twelve adults, five children, and all their luggage. Camped on that luggage inside the boxcar, the group started westward. At times the train moved so slowly that it was possible to walk beside it. For five days and nights they traveled this way, buying such food and water as they could at each stop.

At the end of the railroad line they hired six mule-drawn carts, which often moved even more slowly than the train. The weather turned cold. Food became increasingly more difficult to buy. Always there were rumors of a Muslim rebellion in Kansu.

The truth of the rumors didn't hit until they were some ten miles from Lunghsi, the first C&MA station they would reach. Then, suddenly, they found themselves in a no-man's land between rebel and provincial troops. A mile or so from the stopping point for the night they met a panic-stricken group of muleteers fleeing the Muslim rebels. Only by much argument and

some threatening were Bob and the other men able to keep their own cart drivers from deserting them then and there. Finally they jolted the last couple of miles into an inn in a terrified village. Everyone was convinced that the Muslim rebels would capture and sack Lunghsi the next day. When Bob suggested that they, as foreigners, might be able to make some arrangement by which they would continue, the carters' patience snapped. This was a Muslim rebellion, they declared, which meant the sword for all unbelievers, regardless of nationality.

At dusk the carters consented to lend two horses to Bob and Al Fesmire for a scouting trip. Through the darkness they rode without encountering the bandits, and eventually returned to the inn. Before dawn the following day Bob and Dick Koenigswald rode out on another scouting expedition, hoping to get to the headquarters of the Muslim troops, where they might find the commander, the so-called "Little General" whom Bob had met casually several years earlier.

Shortly after daybreak they met a party of Muslim scouts, who proceeded to hope themselves to a pistol, watch and money. Only Bob's insistence that the troopers escort them to their officers kept them from taking their horses also. Keeping rifles pointed at Bob and Dick, the scouts took them to headquarters and handed them over to the "Major General," a rosy-cheeked boy of about sixteen. To Bob and Dick's immense relief, he greeted them in a friendly fashion and gave the necessary safe-conduct passes.

But before they could return to the rest of the group, they watched the battle as Muslim troops, swinging their heavy swords and shouting their battle cry-"Allah is great; kill, kill!"-charged the machine guns of the Chinese troops. It was a short battle. The soldiers didn't wait for the fanatical rebels to get to them, but turned and fled, only to be cut down by rebel cavalry sweeping in from the sides. With the ironic words "Peacefully on your way; until we meet again" from the general, they returned to the inn where the others were waiting anxiously.

The final day of the journey began long before dawn. They saw no living thing in the villages apart from a few dogs, but the occasional naked corpses sprawled in the fields told their own story. It was dark when they reached the Lunghsi city gates, and after midnight before they were settled for the night. The welcome from the church leaders was kind, but became even warmer when they realized that the missionaries had not returned to

take over direction or control of the church, but were on their way to work among unreached groups.

Shortly after Christmas the group divided, with Fesmires, Carlsons, and Ekvalls heading toward Old City, which they found in a state of terror. The Muslims of the city were divided. Some sided openly with the rebellion, while others wanted no part of it. no Tibetan would stay overnight in the town, and the Chinese population lived in constant fear of Muslim raids. Su Da had moved his family to Dragsgumna for safety but had stayed on in Old City hoping to prevent vandalism to his property. Rumors of a pending Muslim attack were everywhere, but there was no firm news until Will Simpson, staggering from fatigue, rode into town with news that the Little General was on his way to the Old City.

A flood of refugees poured into the mission station, trusting that Bob's links with the general would keep his troops out of the crowded compound. As darkness fell, a whispered prayer meeting began in the church. Bob, Al Fesmire, and Ed Carlson sorted out what they might do when the crisis came, and waited behind the barred gate for the unknown.

Suddenly the sound of bugles and clatter of hoof beats were followed by a pounding on the gate and shouted demands that it be opened. Will Simpson's advice again came to mind: "Take all precautions, trust in God's care, and never panic." Al muttered, "It's up to you, Bob, to talk us to safety-you've done it before." Ed gripped Bob's shoulder as they opened the gate just enough for Bob to squeeze through, then closed it behind him.

Unrestrained Violence

Bob squeezed through the partially-opened gate to face the rifles of the troopers and their shouted demands. This was no time for politeness.

"Didn't you see me riding with the Major General at Lunghsi? He and I are friends! I am under his protection! Don't you dare touch me or anyone with me!"

The muzzles of the rifles wavered for a moment as Bob turned his flashlight onto his own face. Then from the darkness came an authoritative voice:

"He *is* the bearded one who rode at Lunghsi. Move on! Pardon us, sir. We didn't recognize you. No one will bother you now."

The following days were filled with uncertainty. Smoke clouds hung on the horizon, signaling the burning of villages. Troopers rode through the streets carrying their loot. There was torture. There was murder. There were wounded to be treated. Yet through all this horror none of the rebels bothered the mission station or church; the Little General and the Major General had guaranteed their inviolability. Bob was in regular friendly contact with both, and even recovered the pistol which had been stolen outside Lunghsi. He and Ed Carlson made a trip to Chone on behalf of the Little General in an attempt to bring about a truce with the Chone Prince and his Tibetan troops. But their effort was in vain; the Chone Prince was not interested. Instead of a truce, there was an attack on Chone. The entire town and monastery were burned to the ground. Nothing was left except the mud-brick walls to testify to the prosperity that had been.

In Old City a certain amount of normalcy seemed to have returned. But one morning the bugles sounded their order, and the Little General and his army move on, only to be replaced by a mob of lawless robbers. The local people soon drove these out, and peace seemed to have come. Muslims and Chinese congratulated each other on their common action which had driven off the bandits. All was well in the city.

With peace came opportunity for work. The Carlsons moved across the Min Shan range to Dragsgumna, where they rented a couple of rooms from Atang as a first stop to getting into the center of the Tebbu district. The Fesmires stayed on in Old City, and the Ekvalls prepared for a two

month trip into the Grasslands. During their furlough, the Omaha Gospel Tabernacle, under R. R. Brown, had raised money for buying a dozen *mdzo* (yak-cow hybrid). Now they could travel at the leisurely pace of the Tibetans, carrying what they needed for an extended trip. David, now four, was much too big to be carried like a kangaroo baby; he graduated first to a donkey, then to a small grey horse.

Travel with a yak caravan was a new experience. It took both strength and experience for two men to hold the halves of a 180-pound load in place against an ox-saddle and tie it firmly in place. Bob and his helpers practiced in the mission compound for days before they set out. The five-mile trip to Luba on the first day went very well; the loads didn't slip or roll. But the pastor of the Luba church showed his surprise and misgivings by pointing out that such travel had not been done by missionaries, at least not with wife and child. The prayer that they return safely and soon was definitely not a formality!

On the fourth day of travel they came to Samtsa. Suddenly, as they traveled the path between the fields, Bob knew they were in trouble. Men and boys, carrying stones, sticks, and half-drawn swords, blocked the path.

"Fines! Fines for trespass in the wrong time of the year! And by strange foreigners! One ox with a full load as the rightful fine!"

Bob worked his way to the front of the caravan and swung off his horse. Signaling his peaceful intentions by sitting cross-legged at the side of the road, he began his own shouting about his friendship with the Samtsa chief. He recognized the fact that he had made a mistake by trying to go through the farming district while the crops were growing. His shouting got the attention of a grim-faced fellow who suddenly recognized him.

"Hah! You must be the man who came to Samtsa four years ago. You went to Ngawa and were honored by royalty. I must take care of you, for I am the headman of the village of Ga-Ding-Go."

As if by magic, the atmosphere changed. They were led to a convenient meadow where they could camp and become acquainted with their new friends. For two days they camped there, while the headman made the rounds of the other villages, arranging for safe passage by the caravan and payment of token fines for traveling at a time when the caravan might

cause damage to the crops. When they continued their trip, it was among friends.

The next destination was the summer encampment of the nomad branch of the Samtsa tribe. There they found their old friend Duggur, always generous and ready to talk and plan. Bob laid out his plans: two months among the twelve tribes of the great Yellow River plain. Then after returning to Samtsa, he would ask his friend Duggur, "the man of strong words," to ask the Gurdu authorities to give the Ekvalls a place in Lhamo. Duggur's face wrinkled in amusement when Bob referred to him as the man of strong words; Toroma, his wife, laughed aloud. Then Duggur, in turn, insisted that Bob and Betty should stay a month with him.

All was going well as they stayed on. Their horses and oxen put on flesh as they grazed on the lush grass. David made friends with the dogs of the tent, and could wander a little more freely. All was going well-until New Sect traders from Old City arrived with the worst of news.

For some reason known only to themselves, the hard-line Muslims of Old City had begun their own rebellion, slaughtering their neighbors. The New Sect, disciplined and well-armed, had carried out an armed retreat to the safety of a Tibetan monastery. The Chinese, on the other hand, Christians and non-Christians alike, had fled in wild confusion. The news wrecked Bob's plans for travel, for his servants refused to go on. It postponed for at least a year the attempt to get a foothold in Lhamo. Instead, it was back to Luba. News was scarce. The Fesmires, perhaps tipped off by a Muslim friend, had suddenly picked up and left for a Tibetan area. As soon as they left, the gatekeeper had barred the gate on the inside, climbed over the wall, and disappeared.

For a month, refugees who had fled across the Tao River into Tibetan country wondered why no help came. Where were the Chinese and Tibetan troops? Smoke from burning villages hung along the hilltops. The Tao River, brown in summer flood, carried a ghastly freight of bodies testifying to the slaughter going on.

The answer came with the blare of bugles and the spitting of machine guns as a Chinese army attacked and occupied the city. Now came the time of vengeance against the Muslims. Uncertain as to what he would find, Bob made the five-mile ride from Luba to Old City. A scene of horror opened before his eyes. Through banks of smoke, scurrying figures, intoxicated

with killing and looting, went on with their bloody work. Dead lay sprawled in the streets. Two sentinels challenged Bob. One hurried to military headquarters, while the other took him to the mission compound, where soldiers were just about to set fire to the buildings. The compound was filled with horror, crumpled bodies lying thick-one time friends, a faithful servant, and little children. Outside the gate lay the bodies of the first Muslim convert and his family. Above all could be heard the roar of the all-consuming flames.

Bob's escort ordered men to stand guard while he took Bob to see the general. Bob wondered who the general might be, and was amazed to be greeted by the name of an old friend. Four years earlier, commander Chi had made it possible for the missionaries to cross the Yellow River during their evacuation. A year later he had opened the gates of Lunghsi after dark and ordered his troops to leave the mission station so the missionaries could stay there. Now he heard a plea for the preservation of the mission station in the midst of a burning city. His order was terse: the guards must watch all night-or else!

Having promised to return early the next morning, Bob left Old City at a near gallop, hearing the general's last words: "Go in peace all the way; may the Lord protect you!" The return ride the next morning was fast and pleasant, and the corporal of the guard gave Bob a smart salute. Then they went on an inspection tour. They found that rebels had occupied the mission house and had built their cooking fires on the wooden floors. Clothing and bedding had been stolen, and personal papers used as kindling. In a small ground-floor room they found a fresh pile of bodies-men and women dressed as Muslims. In a very casual way the corporal had his men drag them just outside the compound wall.

Daily Bob made the ride from Lube to Old City and back. Daily, commander Chi found some reason for inviting Bob to his headquarters. He was restless and uncertain as he waited for orders to move out. Finally they came. He told Bob that a small watchdog garrison would be arriving, and warned him to stay at the compound to keep the troops from taking over.

Meanwhile events were building to a climax of bloodshed. With safe-conduct passes in hand, Muslims came back to Old City. Then the passes were collected and all men from 15 to 60 years of age were turned over to the Chone militia. Stoically the Muslims passed beneath the swinging swords. Between two and three thousand men were beheaded by the militia,

who were all too eager to take revenge for the destruction of Chone and its monastery.

Someone has said that the Romans created a desert and called it peace. Such was the peace which came to Old City. The population was practically wiped out. Almost the only buildings standing were those on the mission compound, and these were pitted with bullet holes, doors and windows were gone, and great holes gaped in the wooden floors. Yet the buildings furnished shelter for those who came back to restart their lives. The rest of the city lay in ruins and bore the scars of strife for decades to come.

Opportunities and Setbacks

It was ten years before missionaries lived again in Old City, but advances as well as setbacks continued. Bob and Betty, with little David, settled in Samtsa. It was not easy: in village after village they met with broken promises and open hostility. Yet through the good efforts of Duggur they were able to find a couple of rooms where they could stay through the winter. Early in 1930 Bob traveled again to Lhamo with Duggur, who had been cultivating his contacts with the authorities of both the Gurdu and Sechu monasteries. The hostility between the two establishments meant that one might give what the other denied, simply out of spite. Three years earlier, before the sudden evacuation, there had been a tentative promise of land from Gurdu. Now Bob wanted to settle the deal.

Together they went, gifts in hand, to call on the steward. Duggur, the "man of strong words," was the spokesman. His presentation of Bob's request was in the finest tradition of Tibetan oratory, full of proverbs, allusions, and other devices that make a speech noteworthy. Bob could follow only the general drift. Then came the steward's turn. Slowly his tempo increased, but Bob, with dismay, was able to get the main points.

"No land will be given. The foreigner may visit. He will be welcomed as a guest. But the speaker of a foreign religion may not live in Lhamo. No. No. No!"

Duggur stayed only long enough to understand that he was being refused. Then he stalked out, angrily muttering "Why then did you accept the gifts?" Bob stayed to the end of the speck. Then, with shattered hopes, he returned to the monastery guestroom. Duggur was nowhere to be found; he had packed up all his belongings and vanished, leaving word that he would join Bob somewhere along the trail on the next day.

The following day was cold, with steadily-falling rain. As Bob rode away, he wondered if he would ever live in Lhamo. Disappointed in the turn of events, he was glad to be leaving. As he crossed the rain-swollen creek and climbed the hill past the Sechu monastery, he heard Duggur's voice calling him excitedly.

"Get a present; let's go see the Sechu steward. And don't be stingy with the gift!"

Bob was in no mood to see another monastery steward, *any* monastery steward. He had had enough of monastery stewards, and wanted only to get back to Samtsa and the warmth of Duggur's tents. But Duggur was insistent. Reluctantly Bob turned aside and, with present in hand, followed Duggur into the audience room of the Sechu steward. To Bob, the interview seemed inconclusive. The words were polite, as the steward assured Bob of his continued friendship, but were they any more than words? Yet as Bob and Duggur rode away, Duggur was in high spirits.

"I talked all night. I told him all the good you do. I staked everything I have on your integrity. And I told him that since Gurdu has refused, Sechu can spite them by letting you live on the Sechu side of the stream. It's all settled."

Old Duggur, the "man of strong words" knew the tactics that would work. And so it was that in the fall of 1930 Bob, Betty, and David moved to Lhamo. Initially they rented what Bob described as "a nondescript shack with cluttered yard enclosed within a flimsy fence on the edge of the smaller of the two squalid trading posts." Naturally Bob now assumed the role of host/sponsor for friends coming to Lhamo, and the yard was frequently crowded with horses and cattle. Guests slept everywhere, even on the flat roof, until Bob set up a conical felt tent to serve as a guestroom.

Eventually the Sechu monastery made good on their promise and gave a small piece of land on the hillside between the monastery and the creek. This was not a sale to the mission, but a personal gift to Bob because of the recommendation and guarantee of Duggur. As a start, Bob had a wall built around the property, a twelve-foot wall made of tamped earth laced with hidden timbers to foil anyone trying to dig through. But winter was coming, and there was no time to build a new house inside those walls before cold weather settled in. All of Bob's friends agreed that, with no one living inside those walls, they would be ruined before spring. Too many people would be happy to keep the missionaries from settling there.

Sometimes it was possible to buy an existing house and move it, piece by piece, to another sight. Since all timber had to be brought from forests a day's ride down the valley, such houses rarely came on the market. There seemed to be no solution to this problem until Fence Teeth Wanjur came calling. His rambling talk finally came to the point: the house of the former Gurdu Steward was for sale 120 ounces of silver. Why was it for sale? Well…there was one slight problem. No one would sleep in the house,

sturdy and well-built though it was, because it was haunted. Would this matter to Bob speaker of a foreign religion?

Actually there might be real problems. The house was inside the Gurdu monastery. Gurdu had refused to let Bob live in Lhamo. Not only would the house be moved outside the monastery, but it would be moved to the Sechu side of the stream. And it would be going to the speaker of a foreign religion. Would the deal be possible?

The leader of the monks' commune that owned the house was happy to sell. But before Bob handed over the silver, he visited the monastery steward to make sure that he could move the house. Official permission was given.

Moving day came. A crowd of carpenters and laborers began to disassemble and move Bob's new house. But factions had developed among the Gurdu monks, some of whom bitterly resented the selling of the house to the foreigner. Before the end of the day, work was suspended because of threats and flying stones. Bob sent a message to the steward, who replied that he had changed his mind. The house must remain in the monastery. Bob must brink back what had been moved.

For two weeks there was stalemate. Gurdu had the frame of the hose, while Bob had the rest. There were joke; there were threats. Fence Teeth Wanjur brought back the purchase price plus fifteen ounces of silver, hoping to persuade Bob to call off the sale. Friends offered to get the rest of the house by force. Then there came an ultimatum; return all that was in Bob's possession before noon, or the monks would come and get it by force.

At that point Stretch Ears Jamtzen, Bob's best friend in Sechu, entered the picture. Over Bob's protests, he seated himself overlooking the boundary stream with his rifle on his lap. He announced that he would shoot anyone who crossed. Noon came and went. The afternoon passed. Negotiators went back and forth. At dusk they told Bob he should go with them to see the Gurdu steward. With a small gift and scarf in his hands, Bob went again to see the steward. Stretch Ears' bluff, if bluff it was, had worked. Workers moved and reassembled the rest of the house without further problems. The Ekvalls had their home in Lhamo.

The early years were difficult. There were threats of raids; stones were flung over the walls at night. But little by little, friends were made, and the network of host/sponsor and guest/client relationship expanded.

In the summer of 1932 they made another trip to Ngawa, this time with Dr. and Mrs. Vaughan Rees of the China Inland Mission. Dr. Rees' medical skills won friends; the presence of David, now riding his own horse and speaking Tibetan, softened hearts. In Ngawa itself, the change was startling. The trip was made at the invitation of the royal family, and instead of being unwanted interlopers they were welcomed as honored guests. The queen, who had returned the New Testament on the previous visit, asked for one and discussed its contents.

They stayed in Ngawa for three weeks, and visited a Golok tribe beyond Ngawa. The Kang Sar Golok chief insisted that they visit his tribe, but his people lived twelve days' journey away. There simply was not enough time. The Ngawa rulers offered an official recommendation if the Ekvalls and Reeses wanted to visit another Golok tribe of 6000 tents that was just seven days from Ngawa. Most startling, the queen and king invited Bob and Betty to live in Ngawa, the promised land. The doors were opening.

Closer to home, in a village at the upper limits of farming country, lived a young man named A-Ta. He was poor but powerful, for her could read and knew the incantations to drive away hail and cattle sickness. On a trip to Lhamo for the New Year Festival he met Bob and Betty, who gave him some books. For three years he read and pondered. Occasionally he visited Lhamo, and each summer for two years the Ekvalls spent a few days in his village.

Late one night in the Ekvall's guest tent after evening prayers, he dropped off to sleep, but felt himself falling into a black abyss. Then someone in white spoke to him and gripped his hand. Somehow he knew it was Jesus, and that he was safe. Before Bob was up the next morning, A-Ta left for his home village. There his neighbors called on him to recite the usual incantation, but the words stuck in his throat. So again, with two companions, he sat in the guest tent listening to Bob. He said little until Bob asked, "Do you believe?" His companions merely grinned, but A-Ta answered, "I do."

Back in his home village his neighbors watched to see what would happen, for the lamas cursed him with many curses. Wild dogs killed his ox. His horse sickened and died. With no ox or horse he couldn't farm. He could no longer chant incantations, so he cut wood in the forest to earn a living. The lamas continued to curse, but A-Ta held firm, the first believer in the district.

The barriers were falling. Bob and Betty were living in Lhamo, and the door to Ngawa and beyond was open. Then gain disaster struck. Betty contracted anthrax, and hovered for days between life and death. They were forced to return to the States in 1935 and put all plans on hold. At the same time the advance of the Communist armies forced the evacuation of all the mission stations. The picture seemed to be repeating: in 1927 when it appeared that the Ekvalls might be able to settle in Lhamo, the general evacuation cancelled their plans. Now, having moved to Lhamo, and with the doors to Ngawa open, serious illness forced them to leave.

The enforced stay in the States was a time of study and writing. Bob wrote the field history (Gateway to Tibet), a history of the C&MA (After Fifty Years), and numerous articles for *The Alliance Weekly*. In a seminar at the University of Chicago he presented a paper which developed into a small book published by the University of Chicago Press, *Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Borders*.

Among Bob's published writings is a slim volume of monologues entitled *Tibetan Voices*. Each monologue tries to express the thoughts of one of Bob's friends as he confronts the Gospel. This one describes Duggur:

Aged Dweller of the Tents

I wish, alas, I wish I knew
Which way is right, which way is true.

Four years ago I knew, without
The slightest whispering of doubt,
Which way was heaven, which dropped below.
Of course I knew the way I'd go.
It was the way of fifty years,
It was the way, with pain and fears,
I'd built by pilgrimage and prayer,
And Pious offerings everywhere.
So merit-surely reckoned mine
By gifts at every tower and shrine-
Would balance all my sins and blots:
Salvation by the Bodhisats.
But Shes-rab's faith, his Jesus Lord,

Was just a take too weak, to ward
Away the fear and painful strife
Of all that somber afterlife.
I wish, my life, I wish I knew
Which way is right, which way is true.

Three years ago I changed and said,
Two ways were right: both surely led
To peace somehow. One strange and new
For foreign feet, and one would do-
Tibetan path; Tibetan sense-
For me, a dweller of tents.
And though quite different seemed those ways
They'd meet at last through endless days.
'Twas thus I spoke and thus I thought,
Til all my thinking came to nought.

I wish, my heart, I wish I knew
Which way is right, which way is true.

Two years ago I still believed
My way was good as his, but grieved
Because my load so heavy grew;
The road so hard, my hopes so few,
While on his path there seemed to grow,
Like flowers golden in the snow,
Or all the fragrant bloom and yield
Of summer steppe and autumn field,
Both peace, and peaceful words and deeds,
And acts of kindness more than creeds.
Nor were they done for merit's sake,
His way above more sure to make;
But simply seemed to spring from love
As mirrored from the life above.
While on the way I climbed with fears,
Thronged hate and strife-yes, blood and tears.
If I had only learned to use
That charm my way to tame; not lose
It quite, and have to change my creed,
And try new answers to my need.
For I am old; familiar ways
Are safest for old feet. The days
Grow short for testing which is best.
An old man soon will have to rest.
I wish, my soul, I wish I knew
Which way is right, which way is true.

'Twas thus I thought and thus I spoke,
But all is changed. I sudden woke
To strange new doubts, and now my day
Is filled with clouds that hide the way,
And through the mists of doubt I hear
The myriad questionings of fear:
Fear of my sin, fear of its wage,
Fear of its end-Hell's boundless rage-
Fear that the answer to my doubt

Is, that I'm wrong, and so without
A rebirth's chance, I wait my doom.
For thus fears riot in the gloom.
So I have lost what peace I knew
And only cry, What shall I do?

Ah Shes-rab, come within the tent,
And talk with me, then I'm content.
You tell me now, I must believe
In Jesus' name, and so receive
Salvation free-I like to hear
That name of Jesus. In my ear
Its sound is sweet in song or prayer.
I hear its whisper everywhere
When you have told about His love,
And all the tent sites up above,
Where I can pitch my tent, and stay
Encamped within the realm of day.
Yet, how can I of surety
Know it is meant for even me?
And of my tribe, must I alone
Be first to call your faith my own?
For I am old; it's hard to change
To ways uncertain, steps so strange.
Suppose I change, and changing, fail
To plant my feet upon that trail.
Then good or bad I will have lost
My way, nor gained, at any cost,
Your faith. And so between the two
I fall, and fail to find the true.
My heart's so dark-my day is night-
Ah, Shes-rab, pray that God's own light
Will come, and drive the mists away
So I may walk where it is day.
I wish, strange God, I wish I knew
Which way is right, which way is true.

Bob and Betty finally returned in 1939 by way of French Indo China, leaving fourteen-year-old David at the Dalat School for missionary children. They traveled north through Yunnan and Szechuan provinces, approaching Lhamo through the back door, so to speak. For days they followed in the footsteps of one of the Communist armies in the famous Long March. Devastation and destruction was complete, with many villages still uninhabited. As they crossed the swamps of the uninhabited grasslands north of Sungpan, they saw hundreds of skulls of soldiers who had dies in that infamous stretch of land.

At last they were back in Lhamo, where old friends welcomed them warmly. Duggur, however, was not among them. He had died shortly

before their arrival. But his perplexed refrain, “I wish I knew which way is right, which way is true,” had changed. For two days before his death, all he had said was “Jesus…Jesus…Jesus.”

Return to Ngawa

In the summer of 1940 Bob and Betty made their third trip to Ngawa, this time with Edwin and Carol Carlson and their two children, Bob (12) and Carol Jean (8). A sizeable group set out from Lhamo on May 29; twelve people mounted on eleven horses and one mule, four pack mules, seventeen yak, and two dogs. The caravan moved slowly, for yak travel only ten to fifteen miles per day. Between Lhamo and Ngawa we set up tents each night, sometimes near the tent of one of Bob's hosts, other times wherever there was a good campsite. It took half a day to cross the Black River, using a little canvas rowboat that Bob had brought from the States. This avoided the almost inevitable delay at the ferry. The White River was just passable, with water swirling above the stirrups of the riders.

Sixteen days after leaving Lhamo we arrived in Ngawa, where the tents were pitched on the grassy meadow between the trading post and the river. The welcome was warm, and the opportunities for giving the Gospel seemed limitless. From dawn until dark there were visitors in the camp, while Bob sat in the doorway of his tent or on a convenient grassy knoll and talked. He gave hundreds of Gospel portions to those who demonstrated that they could read. Dozens of scholars in the lamasery sent their pupils with short notes, written on small pieces of paper or even chips of wood, asking for copies of the Gospels. One old man begged earnestly for the Gospel of John: "Yes, I can read. No, not Mark. I want John, because my monk brother reads that and says it will show me the way of deliverance from my sins and the way of peace." A group came from the 6000-tent Golok tribe of Ser-ta inviting the Ekvalls to return with them to preach. But their encampments were seven days away by horseback; it was impossible to accept the invitation.

The old queen was now dead, but the king, her husband, was a frequent visitor in the camp. Day-to-day rule was in the hands of the young king, the lad who had visited so confidently fourteen years earlier. And one day, sitting cross-legged on the outskirts of the camp with his steward, he checked off on his fingers the items of his offer to Bob.

"Look," he said, "I who have never given land to anyone, but I *give* it to you-any size you wish-on which to build your house. I give you all the timber for building that you want out of my forest. I'll help you hire builders for building the wall, and cattle for hauling the timber. What else

do you want? Nothing? Then it is settled. Build your house and quickly come and live among us. That is all."

We spent some two weeks in Ngawa, then set out for Sungpan, the gateway for trade with Szechuan Province and South China. A border town with a reputation for all the lawlessness of a wild-west trading post, it was the nearest town with post and telegraph offices. Tea traders met on the first day were carrying a letter from Francis Derk, C&MA missionary in Sungpan, with news of Hitler's victory in Western Europe and a cryptic telegram from Dalat: "David conscious, improving rapidly, no impairment." There was nothing to indicate what this was all about; apparently an earlier message had gone astray. It was impossible to get any more information before reaching Sungpan eight days later.

In Sungpan, the first order of business was to send a telegram to Dalat asking for clarification, which came several days later. David, by then a high-school student, had been hit by a car and had suffered a concussion. The car, however, had belonged to a high French official, who had seen to it that David had had the best of care. He had been discharged from the hospital, and a letter was on its way. There was nothing to do but wait for that letter.

Sungpan was an important trading post, the town through which great quantities of tea entered the Tibetan grasslands. This tea was brought from further south by men who carried greater loads on their back than even a yak could bear. The town itself was about evenly divided between Chinese and Muslims, but the surrounding countryside was inhabited by Tibetans and aboriginal tribespeople whose languages and customs were unknown. Missionaries of the China Inland Mission had lived briefly in the town a number of years earlier, but had been driven out by local hostility.

With the arrival of news from David, Bob and Betty were free to return to Lhamo. Again they crossed the lush but deadly uninhabited grasslands and swamps that had caused the death of so many members of the Communist army just a few years earlier. The skulls were still there, looking like huge mushrooms in the thick grass. The trip was uneventful, and they reached home almost exactly two months after setting out.

The mission held its annual conference in Minchow just a few weeks later. Bob reported on the trip and the prospects for actually living in Ngawa. Edwin Carlson, the field chairman, spoke with amazement of the

opportunities presented in the area, the freedom for preaching, and the open doors to areas even further in the interior. His only concern was over the great distance from the rest of the field. There would be no way to get any message to Ngawa except by sending it with some trader who might or might not succeed in delivering it. A round trip to the nearest post office would take at least ten days.

Yet the offer of land had been made; how could such an opportunity be ignored? So the decision was made: Bob and Betty were to move to Ngawa. Until reinforcements came, they would spend half of each year in Ngawa, half of the year in Lhamo. The door to greater and greater opportunity seemed to be standing open.

Betty's Death

Late on an afternoon in mid-October a lone rider came clattering through the front gate of the mission station in Old City, where I was standing in the yard with my parents, Edwin and Carol Carlson. Mother commented in surprise, "Why, that looks like Betty's horse!"

It was. The rider had come from Lhamo, riding Betty's big red horse, with an urgent appeal from Bob. Betty was desperately ill. Was there any medicine available? (Sulfa drugs were just beginning to appear. Though the China Inland Mission hospital in Lanchow had sent a few pills to mission stations in outlying areas of the province, none had gone to Lhamo.)

Edwin left as soon as he could get his travel gear together, riding through the night on the shortest road to Lhamo. Shortly after crossing the mountain pass, he met Bob and his party-with a coffin slung between two mules. Betty had become ill on the last night of their return trip from conference, and had died a day after reaching Lhamo, before any of her colleagues even knew of her sickness. Bob had found a carpenter to build a simple coffin, and had prepared Betty's body for burial. He had held a simple memorial service in Chinese and Tibetan. Now he was on his way to Taochow and the little mission cemetery in Luba.

Edwin turned around and rode back to Old City, spending more than thirty hours in the saddle without rest. Bob and his party arrived a few hours later. Word quickly went out to the rest of the field, but William Ruhl from Minchow and Stanley Harrison from Hehtso, both two days' journey away, were the only ones to get the word soon enough to be present at the funeral.

In the little cemetery just a short distance from the former monastery of Luba, the refuge to which missionaries had come so often in the turbulent history of the mission, they laid Betty's body to rest. Nearby was the grave of Bob's cousin, Will Simpson, who had given so much wise counsel in past years. He had been shot by Muslim bandits. Also nearby were the graves of Torsten Halldorf, travel companion on the first trip to Ngawa, and Al Fesmire, companion on the long trip across China twelve years earlier. Torsten had died from typhoid, Al from appendicitis. The service, partly in Chinese, partly in English, closed with the sound of Betty's grief-stricken co-workers singing the familiar words

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home…

Bob stayed in Old City for over a month. Hour after hour he paced up and down on the porch of the mission house. Hour after hour he sat in his room with his guitar singing

O Thou, in whose presence my soul takes delight,
On whom in affliction I call,
My comfort by day and my song in the night,
My hope, my salvation, my all!

Oh, why should I wander, an alien from Thee,
Or cry in the desert for bread?
Thy foes will rejoice when my sorrows they see,
And smile at the tears I have shed.
Or…

Fade, fade, each earthly joy; Jesus is mine.
Break every tender tie; Jesus is mine.
Dark is the wilderness, earth has no resting place,
Jesus alone can bless; Jesus is mine.
Or…

My Lord, if indeed I am Thine,
If Thou art my sun and my song,
Say, why do I languish and pine?
And why are my winters so long?
Oh, drive these dark clouds from the sky,
Thy soul-cheering presence restore;
Or take me to Thee up on high,
Where winter and clouds are no more.

Bob's grief was heart-rending to see. The other missionaries were in shock. Bob and Betty had been a superb team; how could Bob continue alone? How could this have happened when doors seemed to be standing open in welcome? Nevertheless, life had to go on. Bob spent several weeks escorting A. C. Snead, Foreign Secretary of the C&MA, to the various stations. This was the first visit from anyone at New York headquarters in decades, a visit which was almost more that Dr. Snead was able to endure. He was a frail man, and the altitude, cold and harsh travel conditions very nearly killed him. On the first day he arrived in Old City, Edwin Carlson rode into the town ahead of the rest of the party. When asked if Dr. Snead was coming, he replied, "Yes. But whether dead or alive, I don't know."

Then the time came when Bob felt he had to return to Lhamo. No amount of persuasion could dissuade him. He wanted to be there for

Christmas. So he set out, going by way of Dragsgumna. The pass over the Min Shan, that range which had seemed such a barrier a few years earlier, was clogged with snow. But he had to go to Lhamo. The trail took him through the Drangwa valley-the "dog-headed" Drangwa, feared and despised by all honest travelers. But it was now a valley through which Bob could pass in relative safety, for he had established a client/sponsor relationship with one of the village families.

So it was that, the night before reaching Lhamo, he stayed with his friends. Hostility on their part had become friendship; wariness on his part had become the trust that allowed him to take shelter in a time of need. Thus three men-grandfather, son and grandson-saw the confidence with which he spoke of the Christian's hope, and committed themselves to the same Christ with whom Betty now lived in safety.

The breakthrough had come, though it came to the sound of Bob's heartbroken cry, "Lord, did it *have* to be this way?"

Epilogue

Bob continued on his way to Lhamo, arriving in time to spend Christmas there. Contact with the believers in Drangwa continued, however, particularly in times of crisis.

The first crisis came when the villagers scheduled the annual ritual intended to keep hail away from the crops. The believers asked Bob what to do. His answer: he would come and they would have a Christian prayer meeting at the same time, praying for the protection from the violent thunder storms.

The second crisis came when the village planned to build a bridge, then offer it to the local lama. Bob's advice: join the building project, since it was for the benefit of the community. Work as hard as anyone else, but don't take part in the religious ceremony.

Little by little other families indicated their desire to become "Jesus-ones," until the village was about two-thirds Christian. At that time some suggested that the non-believers be forced either to convert or to leave the village. Bob's advice: show the same tolerance that was shown to you when you first became Christians.

The following summer, 1941, Bob left Lhamo for a visit to David in French Indo-China. He went to Sungpan by horseback with some companions, then walked down the valley with hired carriers until he reached a motor road. He was in Indo-China when the Japanese attacked the Pearl Harbor. They then took control of Indo-China from the French, putting Americans under house arrest.

Bob had fully intended to return to Kansu even if it meant going by bicycle and foot. Instead, he was repatriated to the United States and never returned to Lhamo, Drangwa, Ngawa, or the other areas he knew and loved so well. Drangwa itself was so remote and cut off from the outside world that it is uncertain whether any other missionary ever visited the valley in the years before the Communist victory brought an end to all missionary work.

What happened to this little Christian community? Has it disappeared under pressure from the government? Or has the remoteness of the Drangwa, together with their independence of spirit, meant that they have persisted as "Jesus-one"?

There are rumors of a Christian community somewhere among the Tibetans of southern Kansu. Is it the village in the Drangwa valley? We do not know. In Lhamo, however, the memory of the Ekvalls persists. In 1990 I visited Lhamo, exactly fifty years after my last previous visit. There I spoke with one of the old monks in the Sechu monastery. When I told him that I had been in Lhamo many years earlier and had known the foreigners who had lived there, he pointed down the hill to the spot where Bob and Betty had lived, "Yes," he responded, "she died right down there." And an old man, hearing that I had been in Lhamo as a child, came up to me in great excitement and exclaimed, "Do you remember me? Do you remember me? You're David, aren't you?"

Afterword

Bob and David returned to the United States in 1944 in one of the exchanges arranged by the Red Cross. Although he was too old to be drafted, Bob volunteered for military service and went to Burma with the rank of army captain. In later years Bob would recount, with amusement, that a note in his file read "No formal military training; well fitted for combat." He was involved in heavy fighting in Burma, then was seriously wounded in China just before the Japanese surrender. David, also in the army by then, went to Korea as part of the American occupation forces. He was killed there is a post-war accident.

Bob remained in the army and served as Assistant Military Attaché in China between the end of the way and the Communist victory. He traveled to Kansu once in carrying out his duties, but the Chinese authorities refused to let him travel even to his birthplace. He retired from the army with the rank of lieutenant-colonel, but was recalled during the Korean war to serve as chief English-Chinese interpreter at the Panmunjom talks.

When he finally left military service, he was associated with the University of Washington and devoted his time to research and writing. In 1980 he visited China for the last time, but was refused permission to go to Kansu. In Sian, however, he visited the newly-opened Great Mosque. There he got little response from the old men until he mentioned that he had known the Little General. Then there were smiles, even chuckles, as thumbs went up to salute the memory of a fighting Muslim.

Bob passed away in Seattle on May 5, 1983, after a career that he described as nineteen years as a missionary, fourteen years in the military, and ten years in the academic world.

For Further Reading

The three phases of Bob Ekvall's life-the mission field, academia, and the military-are all reflected in his writings. A full bibliography covers several pages, but these are the primary works dealing with his years as a missionary.

Gateway to Tibet. Harrisburg: Christian Publication, 1939. A history of the Kansu-Tibetan Border field.

Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Border. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939. Reprinted 1977. A description and analysis of the relationships between the people groups of southwestern Kansu.

Monologues from the Chinese. Harrisburg: Christian Publication, 1939. Verse monologues based on actual people and events.

Tibetan Voices. New York: Harper Brothers, 1946. Partial reprint by Tyndale House (Wheaton, IL), 1968. Verse monologues based on Bob's Tibetan friends.

Tibetan Skylines. New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1954. Reprinted by Good News Publishers (Westchester, IL), 1978. A novel of Tibetan life based upon real people and events.

Religious Observances in Tibet. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964. An analysis of the form and function of Tibetan religious customs.

Fields on the Hoof. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1968. Reprinted by Waveland Press (Prospect Heights, IL), 1983. A description of the economics of nomad life.

The Lama Knows: A Tibetan Legend is Born. Novato, CA: Chandler & Sharp, 1981. A wild story circulating during Bob's time in Lhamo.

Quite a number of articles and reports by Bob appeared in *The Alliance Weekly* during the 1920's and 1930's, as well as in the popular *Asia* magazine.

Appendix

During the extended furlough from 1935 to 1939 Bob had the opportunity for study and writing. This was not a new venture; in college he had majored in writing, but all his manuscripts had been used as kindling by rebel troops occupying Old City. With the enforced stay in the States he had time to produce longer works than the articles which had come form his pen. Probably the first extended work to be published was a booklet entitled *God's Miracle in the Heart of a Tibetan*. Long out of print, it is still worth reading. He wrote:

SINCE earliest childhood, Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso could remember that he was in some peculiar way set apart. As he grew older this impression was intensified, and gradually the knowledge that he was to be a monk-eventually to wear the red and yellow garb and live in the lamasery-gave him that smug self-assurance and vague complacency which is as truly a part of the young acolyte as the very clothes which he wears. His older brother was to become chief of the little tribe, and even at that time was called the "little chief" by all the inmates of the home, but Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso was to become something even greater-a part of the hierarchy that not only rules Tibet and tutors the believers throughout all of Asia, but as an entity of the past, present, and future in its entirety, is deity itself-one of the persons of the Buddhist Trinity.

So he swaggered a bit as he followed the old grizzled monk, who was his tutor, in the performance of the many religious observances of the home. With his bare toes tucked up under the red-trimmed borders of his coat (the border on his brother's coat was black, for he was only a layman) he vociferously learned the alphabet, conscious that while his brother was learning the mysteries of reading and writing more as a matter of utility, he was learning that he might read and intone the mystical sacred writings of his faith, and so through him those writings, the other person of the Buddhist Trinity, might become available-released in magical power-for his people.

Yet there were drawbacks in his high destiny. Sometime when the old tutor wasn't around, he would run wistful fingers over the rifles and cartridge-belts that adorned the walls of his home; or, gripping the handle of the sword that was his brother's dearest possession, tentatively test the heft and feel of the shining steel, somberly aware that only if he should become a renegade and fall from his high estate could those things have a part in his

life. After all he was the son of chiefs, and hot, turbulent blood flowed through his veins. When the hunting party returned and his brother recounted with boastful glee the details of a successful hunt after *myin*-the great wild sheep of the Tibetan plateau-or when alarm of a rumored raid was shouted from housetop to housetop, and the men of the village mounted in hot haste, handling their rifles with the practiced ease and indescribable spirit of the Tibetan brave, his keen little face was aflame with excitement and sharp with envy. Prayers and the rosary, even when they brought the warmest seat by the fire, and the fattest cuts of meat, and pampered ease, seemed somehow inadequate.

YET, as the years went on, his young mind with all its eager desires slowly took shape in the mold that had been prepared for it. When the first great adventure of his life came, and he exchanged him home for life in Labrang, the greatest lamasery in North East Tibet, he was as eager a little zealot as any of the red robed acolytes that read their prayers, skylarked at odd moments, scurried like noisy rats from cloister to chanting hall, and, squeaking with fear, spent much time dodging the lectors-the stern enforcers of lamasery discipline.

Because of his background as the son of a chief, he was spared some of the harsher experience of lamasery life, and had none of the drudgery laid upon him that was the hard lot of many of his companions. Yet the great chanting hall, in which he sat for hours tremblingly demure under the stern gaze of his teacher, was a tomb of Arctic cold in winter, and even the thickest of furs could barely keep the chill out of his bones, while the frost nipped his ears and nose. Back in the cloister he was only one of a number of young acolytes that shared board and lodging with a scholarly monk who drilled them in their lessons, and both because of his position as the son of a chief, and because he early displayed both ability and application, Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso had little to do with the carrying of water, sweeping of rooms, and building of fires.

Instead he was soon taught the wider lore of lamaistic theology in addition to taking an ever-increasing part in doctrinal discussion, letter-writing drill, and related activities. He faithfully learned all the fantastical details of Buddhist cosmology, as well as the Tibeto-centric geography of the lamas. Even all this did not satisfy his intellectual curiosity, and he dabbled in little-known departments of religious teaching that say the final word about medicine, history, poetical composition and even music; for

Buddhism has complete answers in every department of knowledge, and as yet the young monk had no reason to question their validity.

So he grew with the years, acquiring, along with his knowledge, the snobbery and superciliousness of the priestly caste. During the big festivals he was keenly conscious of the veneration that tamed the wildness of each swaggering brave's address to him; a monk who by intoning the sacred Tantras could release blessing and saving power for the people. The old men regarded him as the hope of their fast shortening lives, the aged women gave him a respect that was little short of worship, and if, in the eyes of the young women, awe was diluted by merry thoughts and open flirtation, he merely raised his nose in assured renunciation. Women merely represented the stumbling blocks nature had placed in the pathway of the believer.

Of course ceremonial and even ascetic morality was but a flimsy bulwark placed against the craft, covetousness, and rotten desires of the lamaist hierarchy. Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso well knew the lies, hate, envy, and nameless sin that festered within the whitened cloister walls but, like his fellows, he strained at the gnat, swallowed a camel, and walked his priestly way arrogant in his sacred calling and intellectual powers.

Of all the mysteries of theology that he learned and argued, two things grew to be an almost inseparable part of his inner life. It was at first a mere affectation that he turned away muttering his prayers when a sheep was killed. Later as the teaching of Buddhism filled his mind and heart it was with real horror that he turned from blood. Believing that all life is the same, and that the souls of sheep, rats, and even vermin are merely the souls of men doomed to expiate their sins as lower manifestation of life, he held closely to the strictest teaching, and refused to even join his companions as they made war on the rats that stole the grain and raided the winter's supply of meat. Even vermin were sacred to him and the expedient of hanging out his coat on a bitter winter's night, though utterly effective, bothered his priestly conscience.

Closely linked with this inhibition was his whole-hearted acceptance of the doctrine of reincarnation. It gave new zest to the performance of his religious duties; for religion and the fulfilling of all its laws became the key that would unlock for him the door of a higher rebirth when his soul, having done penance for its sins in purgatorial fires, would come back to earth again. And that rebirth would bring a further chance to progress toward ultimate and absolute salvation-the state when, having passed through the

highest, he would have done with the sixty-eight ways of salvation, needing them no more; for he would have moved off the wheel of life and would rest in nonexistence. Early this law became a part of him, and the cycles of reincarnation-sin, suffering, death, followed by sin, suffering, and death-seemed far more certain than even the laws of physical existence in a material world.

After all even the existence of that material world was debatable, for much of the casuistry of the lamasery discussion groups was occupied with the problem of the real versus the ideal. Such were some of the influences that shaped his life and thinking and ever he gave himself to the acquisition of knowledge, so that by the time he was barely twenty, Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso had become the best stylist and one of the most promising casuists of the great Labrang lamasery.

LABRANG for decades had been the largest lamasery of North-East Tibet and a great number of tribes owed ecclesiastical fealty to it. Thus, although but a day's journey from the actual Chinese frontier, the lamasery authorities had resisted all Chinese governmental penetration and maintained despotic and arrogant control over the trading post and surrounding villages. The Chinese traders who resided at the trading post had to submit to the taxes and arbitrary levies of such a state of affairs, being barely tolerated by the Tibetan authorities. But at this time a new power arose on the north-western frontier of China. A Moslem general was made deference commissioner of the border marches and, in the exercise of his very elastic commission, moved a Moslem expeditionary force into Tibetan territory occupying a number of Tibetan centers, among others Labrang. At one or two points the Tibetan tribesmen offered fierce, but utterly uncoordinated resistance, but the hard-riding, ruthless Moslem cavalry swept all before them, setting fire to temple buildings and cutting down the fleeing monks. With such an object lesson before the Tibetans soon became cowed, and for the time being the entire border trembled under Moslem administration.

At Labrang there was no fighting, the leaders having early trimmed their sails to the prevailing winds, so life at the lamasery went on much as before, but life in the trading post changed rapidly. The Moslems took over all tax collection and much of the local administration. Assured of somewhat preferential treatment, Chinese and Moslem traders came in greater numbers, and at that time came the missionaries, for the first time permitted to settle in temporary quarters amid the indescribable filth of the trading post.

Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso was rather interested in the various reports concerning these foreigners. From all he could learn they possessed a great store of knowledge; knowledge of the outside world, knowledge of Chinese affairs, and a fluent command of the Chinese language. Also they had much to say about a new religion they were spreading, and finally they were most eager to learn Tibetan-not merely the common parlance of the trading post and market place but all the intricacies and niceties of formal discourse and the best usages of the written style. To a Tibetan, who felt keenly the loss of prestige to all things Tibetan that had come from the recent political upheaval, it was most soothing to the feelings to find that men of such obvious attainments and learning were interested in the acquiring of Tibetan. It was because of this fact that he came in personal contact with the first arrival among the missionaries-William E. Simpson. The matter wasn't settled in a day, or even a month, but after much of the protracted negotiating, so dear to the heart of the Tibetan, and the introducing of various friends and sponsors from among some even of the lamas of Labrang, Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso found himself duly engaged as tutor to the missionary and entered upon his duties as teacher of the Tibetan language.

The job involved much more that he had not expected. From the day when, with a due recognition of his position as teacher and a sufficient sense of the honor due himself in that role, he opened the tablets of the alphabet and the grammatical construction rules, he had been forced to hurriedly make a number of adjustments. He found that the missionary had all those things written in books and dictionaries, many of them far more exact and correct than the books available in the Labrang lamasery. He found himself more in the position of acting as a companion in the pursuit of knowledge than as the guide and mentor he had fancied himself. With the pride that came when he considered that men had found the Tibetan language worth all that effort came an eager curiosity as to the motive for such painstaking labor. When he learned that it was that the Jesus religion might become known in Tibet, it started strange thoughts running through his head. He had never heard of any Tibetan learning English and compiling English-Tibetan dictionaries that Lamaism might be preached in the far-off lands across the seas. In addition to all this, his pupil brought to his studying habits of thought and methods of application that aroused his most unqualified admiration.

AGAIN there was the matter of geography. It was a book in Tibetan that was used for reading lessons. In one respect Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso

here felt on safe ground, for the style was more or less faulty, but it was the subject matter that was the most bewildering. He had heretofore accepted Buddhist geography as authoritative and final, even as he had accepted the rest of religious teaching. With habitual thoroughness he had even memorized the maps of the Buddhist world, and could draw from memory that queer jumble of high peaks behind which the sun hid during the night, mythical seas, and the fantastically designated continents extending to the abyss at the far edges of a flat world. Once he had hear a pilgrim recently returned from Peking, Siberia, and Mongolia question the accuracy of that system, for in the mere matter of distance and direction as he had experienced them during his travels, there were glaring discrepancies. That question had been a seed of doubt in his mind that now quickly flowered and brought an abundant harvest as the map of the world was unrolled and the seas and land became the homes and highways of the human race; mapped, plotted, and explored to the farthest pole, and no longer filled with the dog-faced or headless monsters of Buddhist lore.

Full conviction did not come without a struggle and, granting the accuracy of the local maps of China and Tibet, his faith took a last stand over the nature and relation of the earth, sun, and moon. When, however, by diagram and the actual demonstration by globes and lights, the movements of the heavenly bodies were established as an actual fact and the case was closed, his capitulation was final and complete. For all time the infallibility of the sacred writings was destroyed, and although he refused to face the final implications of that fact, from that time on those implications loomed forbidding on the far horizon of his thoughts.

At the same time other facts and thoughts were striking deep into his heart, for one day, opening a new book to begin the reading exercise, he read the words, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”-beautiful and sublime in Tibetan as in all languages. From that day on the Tibetan New Testament, read and reread, became a part of his life. For a time, as detail after detail of the lowly walk among men of God in the flesh was unfolding to him in reading and discussion, he fairly gloated in the many similarities that, starting with the incarnation, seemed but a restatement, in another setting, of the life and some of the teaching of Buddha. Here was no conflict, but merely a similar tale of renunciation. Then he read on and slowly there came to him a revelation of a new Trinity-a God Person utterly different and infinitely above the Buddhistic Trinity. Then he saw one person of that Trinity suffer death,

atoning for the sins of the world, to finally arise triumphant over death-forever a living potent Savior. And as the Triune God-three *person* in one-utterly outranking all the pale personifications of impersonal principle that compound the Buddhist Trinity, had silenced his gratified enumeration of resemblances; so now salvation by atonement with a resurrected Savior as the power and pledge of that salvation, swept aside the circuitous ways of salvation by merit, and day by day the question pressed upon Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso "What will you do with Jesus who is called the Christ?"

Conviction deepened until it became but a step to full acceptance. Sometimes, contemplating that acceptance as an already established fact, he discussed the aftermath of such a step, pondering ways and means of escape, for only in flight could he hope to escape the murderous fury of the lamasery authorities. His mind and heart became a battleground between conviction and fear, and the conflict filled his days and nights with unease. But more than fear, the power of Buddhistic theology with its many ramifications and subtleties was still entrenched in all his thinking and, unable or unwilling to meet the issue, he spent days in debate, and in the fascinating but vain attempt to harmonize the claims of the "Word which was made flesh" and the "Jewel in the lotus."

As he further tampered with conviction, the will to believe weakened and at this point, seeking an answer to some of the allusions in the New Testament, notably the Epistle to the Hebrews, he opened the pages of the Pentateuch and read with ever increasing amazement the record of the blood-stained typology which was God's ordained way of man's approach and means of reconciliation. All the teaching of his faith, all the accumulated prejudices and habits of thought from earliest childhood upward, all the inhibitions of his life and priestly caste; these and much else had a part in his rejection in type and consummation of God's way-bloody sacrifice; realizing the logic of it, with all the implied awfulness of sin, Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso made his choice, turned his back on it, and went on his priestly way.

This period of choice and final, although fitful and at times regretful, decision occupied at least a couple of years. At the end of that time the external circumstances of his life experienced a great change. High Moslem authority demanded a finished Tibetan scribe who was young enough to learn Chinese, to act as a Tibetan secretary in the Bureau of Tibetan Affairs, so Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso was chosen. He went to Sining, where, as he became immersed in the pursuit of learning and the varied activities of

official life, he gradually discarded his priestly garb and much of the externals of his distinctive caste. He still read his New Testament with interest and pleasure, even as he read many other books, and he cultivated cordial and pleasant relations with the resident missionaries of the provincial capital even as he numbered among his friends officials, Chinese scholars, young intellectuals returned from Europe and America, and many other of the interesting personalities that crossed his path, while with a keen delight that bordered on intoxication, he ever followed after knowledge. And gradually amid these various pleasures and preoccupations the question about God's way of salvation was crowded into the shadowed background of his thinking.

SUCH was Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso and his state when I first met him. I was far beyond the border in Tibetan country and a guest in the great guest room of the king of Ngawa, eating *tsamba* and drinking tea from a wooden bowl, dressed completely as a Tibetan, and only different in appearance from those around me in color of my hair and eyes. he was dressed nattily as a Chinese officer, carrying himself with a certain aloof distinction and evidently of considerable importance and privilege, and we stared at one another with mutual amazement.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" was the thought and startled utterance of each, seeing contrasts and strange paradoxes in the other. I was a missionary feeling a way for the Gospel on one of the farther outposts of missionary advance, and he was interpreter and official associate of a representative of the Chinese government there on a diplomatic mission. This initial contact was multiplied a score of times in the days that followed as the tedious course of his mission unrolled itself. The details of investigation, treaty-making, and the giving and taking of pledges took much time. But the occasion, growing out of an intertribal raid, was one of grave importance, for it was causing a hasty arming of all the tribes of North East Tibet as they took sides in the affair. The entire region was fast becoming a great armed amp, and no one could foretell the ultimate result. Conference after conference was held and I, by reason of an unimpeachable neutrality, and Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso, by reason of his powers and position, found ourselves in close association as negotiations went on.

Yet it was more than a matter of routine business with him. The raid had meant the death of all the members of his family except two sisters and a younger brother. So the old men of his tribe clung to him with loud weeping, begging him to take over the active leadership of the tribe. His

sisters and little brother were refugee guests of the King of Ngawa, and as we became friends sure friends in the slow intimacy of long fireside talks, he confided to me something of the burdens in aim and purpose he was carrying both for his family and people. Secure in all the bright prospects of his official career, he had no intention of becoming the active chief of the tribe, and yet they were his people, in some way looking to him to bring them assurance and leadership. He hoped and planned for a temporary arrangement until his younger brother should become old enough to assume the responsibilities of chieftainship.

Yet in it all he was the son of chiefs and his conscience was not easy. So he purposed an atonement. He would bring his people a higher good. And that benefit would be education. Something had to be done soon in bringing about an adjustment of the people of North-East Tibet to the modern world of science, sanitation, and luxury beyond the ken of the simple nomads of the steppes. He believed education would bring about that adjustment, and planned hopefully not only for modern education for his younger brother, but for schools for the Tibetans, and talked largely of the need for translation of textbooks to make Western learning available for his people.

As to the Gospel, he would only talk of it impersonally with a certain intellectual pleasure as one would talk of interesting aspects of philosophy, ever sidestepping the personal application of Gospel truth. Only once, when we talked of William E. Simpson, his early pupil in Tibetan-whose body at that very moment, unknown to both of us, was lying by a Chinese road pierced by thirteen bullet wounds-did he lift the curtain of the past and reveal some of the agony of conviction and indecision that had been his. And even then he held it resolutely in the past, giving it no place in the present.

OVER two years passed, during which we corresponded intermittently, and then he visited us in our Tibetan station of Taktsang Lhamo. Again he was a diplomatic agent vested with considerable authority, but he put off official invitations, to spend the afternoon and evening with us. It was a full day. Borrowing words and terms from English and Chinese to supplement the deficiencies of Tibetan scientific terminology, or coining new phrases in Tibetan to meet the need, he argued and discussed with unmistakable implication, and yet perfect courtesy, the nebular hypothesis is relation to creation; the flood in the light of archaeological finds of Sumerian culture; evolution in relation to the first

chapter of Genesis; and such similar topics. He referred to the writings of Darwin, H.G. Wells, Bertrand Russell, and others. As argument waxed and waned he intimated delicately that he wished to be satisfied that we had gone far enough in school to know what it was all about and were qualified to speak. Tibetan friends came in, listening with amazement to materialistic philosophy expressed in extemporized terminology, until finally we sat around the supper table talking local politics for the benefit of my local Tibetan friend.

Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso had talked himself into a position on the fine dividing line where God might be the highest point in the evolution of an idea, or might be merely a lingering bit of superstition to be discarded and thrown away. Desperately, as he piled argument upon argument, he buried not only Christ but all religion deep in the limbo of outworn and discarded faiths. And so when we said good-bye, although there was a vast amount of sincere regard for all his missionary friends, yet Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso seemed more than ever lost to the Gospel and far away.

Some years later, in 1935, we were staying in Lanchow at the China Inland Mission Hospital. Strange and bitter circumstances seemed to have hedged us in from having any part in giving the Gospel to the Tibetans. Then one day, at a time when he thought I was in Taktsang Lhamo and I thought he was in Sining, Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso and I met on the hospital terrace and the broken thread of interrupted fellowship was spliced anew, and throughout the summer with ever-increasing frequency he was our visitor.

WITH his natural gift and peculiar accomplishments he had moved steadily upward in his career and had become Tibetan Secretary and Agent attached to the governor's official headquarters in Lanchow. He handled all official matters connected with the Kansu section of the Tibetan frontier and beyond, and was most decidedly in the *know*. And just at that time momentous happenings of vital and equal importance to both of us were taking place beyond the border. The great Chinese communist army had marched at will through the major portion of Central and Western China and, breaking into Eastern Tibet, had come to the turning point of that march. The wild tribesmen of the upper steppe were giving it its first reverses, and desperate fighting was going on within a day's journey of Leg Bshad Rgya Mtso's home. If the communist army fought its way back into Chinese territory, it meant the cessation of missionary work for an indefinite period. Lanchow at that time was filled with wild and contradictory rumors,

bringing frantic causeless panics and equally causeless moods of blatant over-confidence. So day by day Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso and I collaborated in trying to winnow grains of truth from the drifted chaff of a thousand rumors; seeking form a score of divergent sources to learn what was really happening, that he might know about his own people and that I might know what to write to missionaries dependent for safety of word from the capital.

Yet only a small part of our time together was spent in the discussion of news. He was in a far more thoughtful mood than when we had last met, and the pronouncements of materialistic philosophy came far less readily and complacently to his lips. Some days, meeting the issue squarely, he would bring his Pentateuch, Psalms, and New Testament, and together we would trace from Genesis to Revelation the line of the blood-stained, blood-bought path that is God's way, and the only way for the sinner seeking peace. Pausing maybe in Genesis that I might learn from him of hitherto unsuspected Tibetan religious lore that antedated both the Buddhist and the Bon religions, and finding traditions (only to be perceived by the initiated in the turning of a phrase of the implications of an oath) of an early knowledge of a God whose image, marred by the obliterating influence of time and the impact of at least two later religions, was yet dimly discernible as being like God who dealt with men in the times of Abraham and Moses. Then lingering long in Revelation that he might find startling resemblances in the prophesies of the Patmos panorama with the esoteric prophecies of the Buddhist writings, we would together talk world politics, trying speculatively to fit the facts of a chaotic world into the imagery of that great vision.

At other times we would talk of the changes that were taking place in Tibet itself and discuss the possible outcome of the projected return of the Panchen Lama, who was in Lanchow at the time. Or he would discourse on the principles and rules of Tibetan poetical composition, illustrating his talk with samples of the hymns he would write if he were a believer-a bit of by-play that seemed strangely fantastic in the light of his persistent refusal to yield.

Again our talk was nothing of objective discussion, but was the utterance of soul agony and personal need, for increasingly he was under a great and growing conviction. And well he might but, for by this time the entire missionary force along the border, the missionary colony of the China Inland Mission in Lanchow, and many interested individuals in faraway America were praying for Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso. Sometimes his face

would be haggard and drawn as though in physical agony, and he would sigh, “I never slept all last night.”

Yet is seemed he could not break free. All the malignant forces of his early training and faith, all the triumphs of his intellectual growth, all the prizes and problems of his career, and all the infinitude of doubt that is part and parcel of the very being of such a man as Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso, battled fiercely in his heart and mind with the claims of Christ.

So we come to the date Friday the thirteenth of September, 1935. We were to leave very soon, and he had come to say goodbye. For once little talk and conversation seemed possible between us. Yet he started to raise some of the old discussion, the old argument, and the old doubts, but I felt the matter was out of my hands.

“We have come to the end of words between us about the truth,” I said. “Now you must talk to the Lord. If it is ‘yes,’ tell Him. If it is ‘no,’ tell Him.”

The silence that came lengthened until the suspense was at the unendurable tightening-like a wire-of our very heartstrings, and I could only pray. What happened, and more the immediate means of that happening, will ever be to me one of God’s miracles.

Always it had seemed to us that the doctrine of reincarnation is one of the strongest bulwarks in the hearts of the Tibetans against the entrance of the Gospel. It makes sin a little less awful, it makes salvation a little less blessed, and it takes away the finality of the terrible state of the lost. Always, with the recurrent implications of a second, a third, and even an unending succession of chances, it lulls the soul to indecision and indifference. Yet from the thronging specters of past beliefs, doubts, arguments, and reasonings that filled Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso’s heart, the Holy Spirit used just that masterpiece of Satan-the doctrine of reincarnation-as the last urge to lead him across the borderline of decision.

He spoke-carefully, precisely-as though stating an equation in mathematics: “If Buddha is right and Christ is wrong, even if I follow Christ I only lose my religious chance in this life. There will be another rebirth and I will have another chance. But if Buddha is wrong and Christ is right and I do not accept Christ, then I am lost to the endlessness of time. I will believe.”

It was the argument of the greater good or the lesser evil. During many years of missionary work, in all the arguments that so often centers around the doctrine of reincarnation, I had never thought of it. even now I do not know in all honesty whether its use is permissible or not. But Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso was on his knees, and the prayer that went up to heaven was no calculating choice of the lesser evil or the greater good. Set with unique beauty in the phraseology of the Psalms and New Testament, it was weighted with the terrible fear of eternal loss, and, as the floodgates broke and tears and sobbing choked utterance, it was finally soothed by the assurance of God's love and forgiveness. When we rose to our feed I knew that one sinner had found God at the end of the blood-stained, blood-bought way.

Again there was a lengthening silence, but no suspense, for it was the silence of rest and peace. Then like a whisper of peace out of his once-tortured soul, Legs Bshad Mtso spoke from behind hands that were still spread to hide his tears. "All the misery has gone from my heart. Oh, I have been so miserable."

All uncertainty was gone, and gone, too, was his indecision, for in the simplest manner, as a matter of course, he took a great step of renunciation. The Chinese Association for the Propagation of Buddhism was securing a committee to translate the Buddhist scriptures from Tibetan into Chinese. Big headquarters were to be set up in Shanghai and Nanking, and he had been offered the chairmanship of that committee with all the honors and rewards, culminating with a promised trip abroad that went with such a position. To the scholarly soul of Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso that trip and all it would mean must have seemed like the highest prize life could offer, yet now there was no hesitation. Quite simply he remarked, "Of course now I can't have any part in that."

Then we parted-Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso to go on with his official duties, looking into the future and wondering what the next stop would be. He is reputedly one of the best, if not the best, Tibetan scholar in all of the North-East Tibet. He is a chief with a tribe still looking to him for the final word as to its future. He is Tibetan in every fiber of his being, intensely devoted to the traditions and honor of his people. All the way as we came home on furlough I thought of him and wondered what the path of his future life might be.

Something of answer to that, something of appeal to all who are called by His Name, is contained in two sentences from Legs Bshad Rgya Mtso's recent letter:

"I must know more of the Bible. What school should I attend to learn more of the Jesus doctrine? Because it must be preached to the Tibetan peoples of Amdo." And again, "Sometimes fears arise and I am tempted to doubt, but I remember that you and the brethren of the church in America are praying for me, and my heart is peaceful once more."

By this last word our lives are linked with his in obligation and a sacred pledge, sharing the task of giving the Gospel to all the peoples of North-East Tibet.

Glossary

Chone (today spelled Jone): a small city on the north side of the Tao River, having a large monastery on the hill above the city. For several centuries it was the seat of a semi-independent principality. The hereditary ruler held sway over some 48 clans of Tibetans who obeyed him when they felt like it. The prince was treacherous and vindictive, helpful to missionaries only when it seemed advantageous to him.

Goloks: a term referring to a number of different nomadic tribes noted for their independence of spirit and wild ways. They inhabited large areas north and west of Ngawa.

Gora: the practice of walking or prostrating oneself around a sacred object or place in order to gain merit.

Labrang: one of the largest monasteries in North-East Tibet, with several thousand monks. It was a crossroads for Chinese, Tibetans, Muslims, and Mongols. Most of the monastery was destroyed during China's Cultural Revolution of the 1960's, but it is being rebuilt. Today the monastery is called La-bu-leng-si in Chinese, and the trading post, now a good-sized town, is called Xiahe.

Lanchow: the capital of Kansu province, now a city of several million people. Today the name is spelled Lanzhou.

Lhamo, or Taktsang Lhamo: a town at the exact source of the Pai Lung (Bai Long) River, which flows through Tebbu country. There were two rival monasteries, Sechu (800 monks) and Gurdu (1200 monks). It was important as a trading center for many tribes of nomads. Today it is called (in Chinese) Lang-mu-si.

Little General: a Muslim military leader who fought both for and against the Chinese government. After the events of this book he led his army northwest into Sinkiang province, and was reported to have died in Moscow in about 1935. His true name was Ma Chung-ying (or Ma Zhungying).

Luba: about five miles from Old City, on the south side of the Tao River. The little monastery halfway up the hillside was sold to the mission early

in the 20th century because the lama had disappeared and the monastery was bankrupt. The chanting hall was torn down and the timbers used in constructing the Titao church. A ferry crossed the Tao River below Luba. The river could be forded when the river was low, but the ford lay in the shadow of a steep hill, from the top of which a rifleman could easily pick off those trying to cross. Decorative woodwork from Luba can be seen in Chicago's Field Museum.

Lunghsi (today called Longxi): a Chinese city at the edge of the C&MA field.

Min Shan: a range of mountains between 12,000 and 14,000 feet in elevation, forming the divide between the Yellow and Yangtze River systems.

Minchow (today called Minxian): a Chinese city over 2000 years old. The mission station, in the middle of the city, was the location for many of the annual conferences.

Ngawa: the center of an independent and powerful kingdom governed by hereditary rulers. On today's maps it is called by its Chinese name, Aba.

Ohm Mani Padme Hum: the basic prayer-formula repeated by Tibetans everywhere. The most common translation is "O the Jewel in the Lotus," but the meaning is uncertain. The formula is printed of prayer flags, inside prayer wheels (turned by hand or water power), and carved on small slabs of stone, boulders, and cliffs.

Prayer flags: flags of very flimsy narrow material, imprinted with prayer formulas, and hung anywhere that a breeze can reach.

Scarf of Blessing, or Kha-ta: a thin scarf, up to six feet long and eighteen inches wide, which accompanied every gift and could itself signify a symbolic gift. In quality it could vary from cheap cheesecloth of fine silk.

Taochow Old City: the first city in Kansu where Alliance missionaries settled. Located five miles north of the Tao River, which in that area was regarded as the border between Chinese and Tibetan territory. Looking down the little valley in which it was located, one could see the rocky cliffs of the Min Shan on the horizon. Old City, so called to

distinguish it from Taochow New City, some fifteen miles away, was a major trading post for Tibetans. Today it is called Lintan.

Titao (today called Lintao): a distinctly Chinese city with a history going back some 2000 years. It was the center of the Chinese branch of the mission's work.

Tebbu (or Tebu): the general name for a number of Tibetan clans along the Pai Lung or White Dragon River and its tributaries, south of the Min Shan range. Ekvall described them as "surly, morose, violent, and unpredictable."